Material poetry of the Renaissance / The Renaissance of material poetry: An annotated record of the exhibition

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An Annotated Record of the Exhibition

PART ONE: MATERIAL POETRY OF THE RENAISSANCE

1. Hrabanus Maurus, "De imagine Christi," *De Laudibus Sanctae Crucis*, Pforzheim, 1503 [C772.30*], sig. Aii^r.

Hrabanus Maurus (784?–856), the abbot of Fulda and later the archbishop of Mainz, wrote in the midst of the "new monasticism," a period associated with a revival of literacy and learning. In religious and secular spheres, the written word — contracts, wills, and laws as well as scripture — commanded a new authority.[1] This "script culture," as Rosamond McKitterick has it, used the written word not only as a mode of communication but as "a resource, a guide, a key, and an inspiration," especially in the devotional practice of Christianity.[2]

Monasteries were the major sites of manuscript production; as God's word revealed itself through the written word, the clergy in turn, as liaisons between God and the laity, guided devotion through the medium of the book. An educational innovation involved the copying and recopying of Biblical passages as meditation: thus literacy came to be a form of knowing God. In much of his voluminous writing — he was one of the most learned men of his time — Hrabanus Maurus acknowledges the strong link between the written word and the spirit:

> Only letters are immortal and ward off death,
> only letters in books bring the past to life.
> Indeed God's hand carved letters on the rock
> that pleased Him when He gave His law to the people,
> and these letters reveal everything in the world that is,
> has been, or may chance to come in the future.[3]

In *De Laudibus Sanctae Crucis* (composed circa 810), Hrabanus Maurus's adoption of the early medieval form of the *carmen cancellatum* — which foregrounds or "cancels" a visual pattern or image and the text it contains over a grid-like verbal background — and his iconography recalling the geometric symmetry of both classical columns and pagan zodiacs, indicates his investment in tradition and classi-

[1] See Janet L. Nelson, "Literacy in Carolingian Government," *The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 258–96.

[2] Rosamond McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 273.

[3] Peter Godman, ed. and trans., *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), p. 249.

cism. In his mesostics — that is, poems in the middle of which a vertical "intext" can be extracted from a horizontal context — Hrabanus Maurus hopes to achieve a *sensus mysticus* which he considers the transcendence of the literal meaning of words. (Poems with vertical messages along the extreme left and right margins are called acrostics and telestics, respectively.) One of the initial poems in *De Laudibus Sanctae Crucis*, "De imagine Christi," concerns the human and divine nature of Christ and can be read in various directions. Where the image overlays the text, the "cancelled" letters form words that describe the symbolic meaning of that part of the image: Christ's halo, for instance, contains the epithet "Rex regum et dominus dominorum" ("King of kings and Lord of lords"). [Danielle Smith-Llera]

2. Hrabanus Maurus, "De adoratione crucis ab opifice," *De Laudibus Sanctae Crucis*, Augsburg, 1605 [Typ 620.05.456F], sig. Kiii[v].

In figure 28 of *De Laudibus Sanctae Crucis* (1605), the image of the monk kneeling before the cross could serve as an analogy for the ambiguous relation between the reader and the text. In the Vienna manuscript of *De Laudibus*, the monk gazes at the cross, but in the other important source, a manuscript in the Vatican Library, he looks at the reader.[4] Like the monk before the cross, the reader is challenged and humbled by the deferral of a single reading; but as the text gets broken down into its simplest parts, it becomes a sort of puzzle with clear solutions that can empower the reader. Hrabanus Maurus authorizes this experience by providing the reader with a method of decoding the poem: the same text appears in a standard form opposite the carmen cancellatum. Are we frustrated or enabled? Are Hrabanus Maurus's latent but insistent inscriptions of his own name and image self-effacing or self-aggrandizing? In any case, the grid with its superimposed image transcends its literal meaning to serve as a sort of icon, a material presence, with explanation provided separately, through which the devotee may reach a *sensus mysticus*. [Danielle Smith-Llera]

3. Simias Rhodius, "Wings of Eros," in Theocritus, *Eidullia Theokritou Triakonta* (Greek), Rome, 1516 [*OGC.T342.516], sig. Miii[r].

> Behold me, lord of deep-bosomed earth, who placed Heaven elsewhere —
>   don't fear if, though I'm small, thick hair darkens my cheeks,
>   for I was born when Necessity ruled,
>   and all the earth's creatures obeyed
>   her awful warnings — so
>   did the sky's.
>   Of Chaos,
>   not of Cypris nor
>   of Ares am I called the swift-winged son;
>   for I ruled not by force but with gentle language,
>   and the earth, and the sea's depths, and bronze heaven obeyed
>   me, and I made the old scepter mine, and made laws for the gods.

Simias's technopaegnia — or lyrics whose lines fill a certain shape — were composed circa 300 B.C.E., and rediscovered during the Renaissance. [Stephen Burt]

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[4] Dick Higgins, *Pattern Poetry: Guide to an Unknown Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), p. 35. Th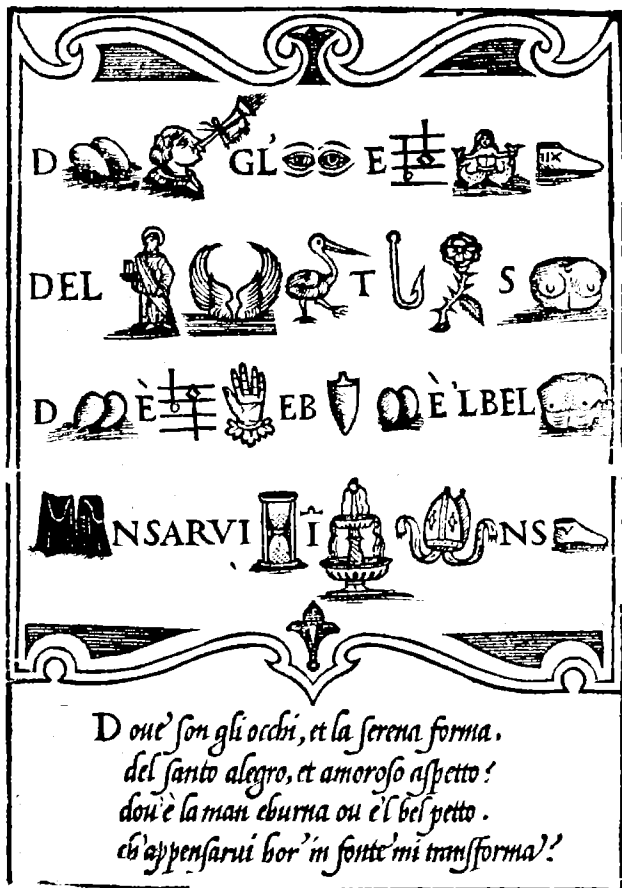e two manuscripts are Österreichische National-bibliothek 652 and Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Codices Reginenses Latini 124.

XXVIII. Figura.   De adoratione Crucis ab opifice.

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O mnipotensvirtusmaiestasaltasabaoth
E xcelsusdominusvirtutumsummecreator
F ormatormundihominumtuver●redemptor
T umealausvirt: tugloriacunctasalusque
T urextudoctortuesrectorcaremagister
T upastorpascensprotectorverusouilis
P ortiotuqemeasanctesaluatoretauctor
D uxvialuxvitamercesbonaianuaregnies
V oxsensusverbumvittutumlaetapropago
A dtedirexietcumulansnuncdirigoverba
M ensmeateloquiturmentisintentiotota
Q uicquidlinguamanusoratetbuccabeate
C orhumileetvitaiustasacratavoluntas
O mniatelaudantetcantantcristeserene
N amq: egotedominumpronusetlaetusadoro
A tqecrucidemisetuachincdicosalutans
S pemoroteramusaramara. umaretorohinc
H ocmeusestardorelarushocignisamoris
H ocmeamensposcitprimumhocfamenetora
H ocsitiseftanimimandendimagnacupido
V tmetupiefufcipiafbonecristeperaram
O blatumfamulumqoduictimafimtuaiefus
H oftiaqodtuafimmemetcrucifixiototum
I amtuaconfumatetpaffiomitigetaestum
C arnalemvitiaconfringatdeprimatiram
R efrenetlinguampietatisverbareponat
M entempacificetvitamdeducathonestam
N amquetuusquandototofulgescetolympo
I gneusaduentustorrebitetardoriniqos
T empeftasftridetcornuiammugitetorbe
A nteapparebitquandocrucisaeresignum
T umrogomeeripiatflammisvltricib: ipfa
A tqepoetamagnipropriumdefendatabira
C uicanoiurecanamh . . . anusverfibusore
C ordemanufemperdo . . . mmemorabilecantu
Q uoddederatvitaeme . . . menterinara
Q andoipfaiefuscle . . . rogoaberuitimo
I nfernireqiemnunc . . . arcepolorum
D amihihocpofcofperoe . . . aomniacredo
Q uaepromififtihocten . . . tatefideqe
Q uodveraxfacisordineiudici . . . mniavero
I nuncadfuperofincaelisf . . . it . . . riumphos
O lausalmacrucisfemperfinefinevaleto
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Θεοκρίτου Πτερύγιον.

4.   Giovanni Pierio Valeriano Bolzani, "Ovum dactylicum," *Hexametri, odae et epigrammata*, Venice, 1550 [*IC5.V2368.550h], p. 134ᵛ.

This pear-shaped poem, dedicated to Daniel Barbar, was one of the best-known concrete poems of the Renaissance. "Ovum dactylicum" and Simias of Rhodes's technopaegnia inspired a fervent attack by the English scholar Gabriel Harvey — perhaps on the grounds that shaped poems, as exaggeratedly self-contained objects, defeat the intertextual readings for which Harvey was well known. Harvey's views were presumably in the minds of late-century neo-material poets such as Spenser and Watson when they eschewed merely shaped verse in favor of more ambitious poetic strategies.[5] [Eve Herzog]

5.   Giovanni Battista Palatino, "Sonetto Figurato," *Compendio del Gran Volume de l'Arte del Ben Scrivere*, Rome, 1566 [Typ W525.66.671], sigs. Fviᵛ–viiʳ.

5   Gabriel Harvey, "From Harvey's 'Letter-Book,'" *Eliza-bethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith, 2 vols.   (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904), 1:126.

A traditional Italian sonnet must be constructed according to exact formal principles, but little consideration is given directly to the poem's visual appearance. Palatino's "Sonetto Figurato," however, emphasizes the image on the page: the celebrated Calabrian printer and calligrapher had long been devoted to the material elements of words. Not only is the poem presented as a rebus, but the stanzas are separated by ornate borders on different pages (*stanza* is Italian for *room*, and in this sonnet each verse paragraph in fact has its own room), and rhymes are visually evident because similar icons are used for rhyming sounds.

In the first line, Palatino invokes the "serene form" of both the woman and the sonnet. Yet the icon he uses to represent the word *serena* is a siren, not the most serene figure in classical mythology. The next line shows us another important part of the sonnet's function, the *amoroso aspetto*, the aspect of love. The word *amoroso* is represented by a hook behind a rose, a pictogram for the standard view of a Petrarchan love sonnet: beautifully crafted verse designed to capture a beloved's heart. Like the song of the siren, it appears to be lovely and serene, but behind this exterior is a more treacherous intent. [Jamie Ciocco]

6. Richard Willes, "Ara Christiani Religioni," *Poematum Liber*, London, 1573 [STC 25671], p. 4.

SONETTO.

FIGVRATO.
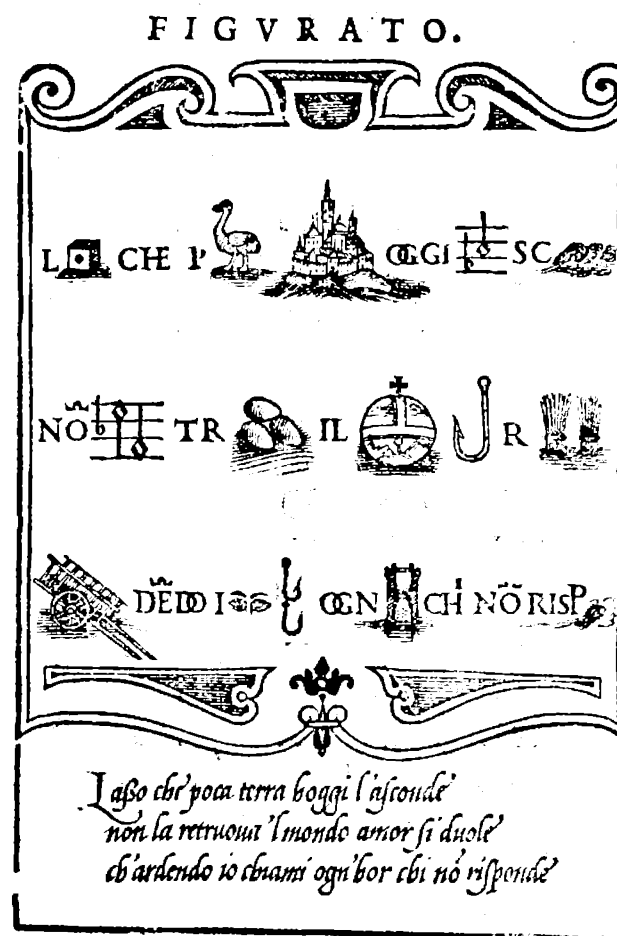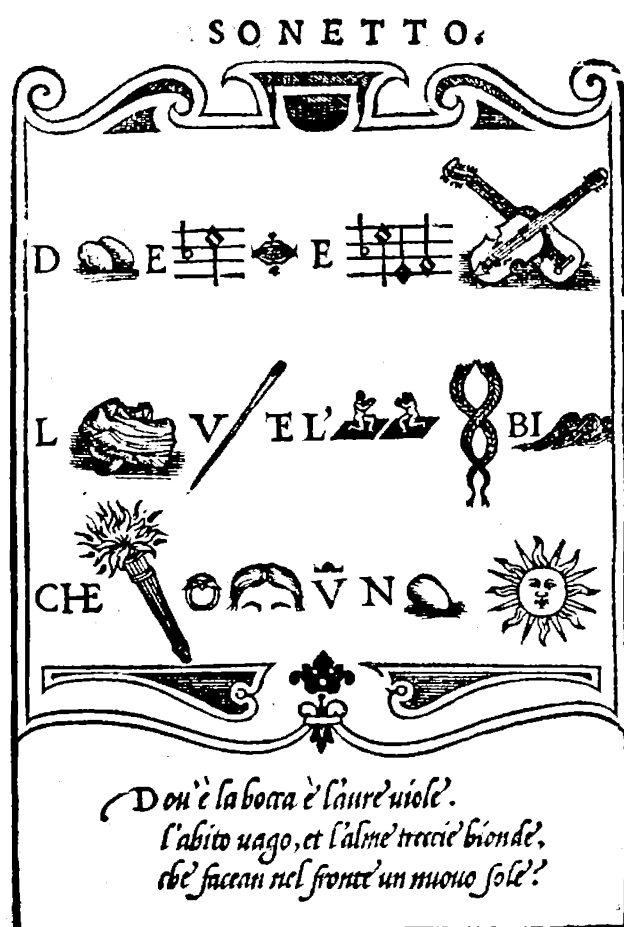
Willes's Latin poems mark a transition between the technopaegnia of recently re-vived Hellenistic poets such as Simias and those of George Herbert, Robert Herrick, and other successful experimenters of the seventeenth century. The shaped poems of the *Poematum Liber* are the earliest technopaegnia known to have been composed by an Englishman. According to Gabriel Harvey—not a disinter-ested observer—Willes repudiated them after publication.[6]

7. Edmund Spenser, "August," *The Shepheardes Calender*, London, 1586 [STC 23091], p. 31ʳ.

First published in 1579, Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender*, one of the most innovative books of European poetry in the sixteenth century, holds a peculiar place in the spectrum of works that ranges from the most conventional to the most concrete. Although the *Calender* contains nothing as obvious as shaped verse, its materiality is insistent. Beginning each eclogue with an illustrative woodcut and an argument (both of which provide a reduced version of the poem), and ending with a gloss, Spenser sifts meaning out of the poems themselves, and highlights the lack of

6 Harvey, "Harvey's 'Letter-Book,' " *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. Smith, 1:126.

4   R. WILLE II
   4   ARA
          Chriſtianæ religioni.

              Θεοκριλικᾶς

          Sanƈto renatus infans
          Baptiſmatis lauachro,
          Deinde CONfirmatus in vera
          Fide ſacrata Prǽſulis manu,
          Et leƈtus in ſortem Dei puer:
          AETATE vernali procelloſas
             Noſtri per vndas Ponti,
             Fineſquế Brabantinos,
             RHENI per oras late,
             Celſas & inter Alpes,
             Taurumǻ, Apenniniǻ
             Iuga p Hetruſcas vrbes
             Faſſus polo TONAntis
             Sāƈtǔ ac tremědǔ nõen:
          Adultus inter GALLICAnas
          Neces profeſſus CHRISTIanum,
          Vir CHRISTIANA Religione
          Ruam ſceleſtus ? Derelinquam
          Senex?mori ab meme ante malim.

LONDINI, CIƆ.IƆ.LXXIII.

Item 6. Richard Willes, "Ara
Christiani Religioni." Poematum
Liber. London, 1573.

importance of any specific action or utterance in the eclogues. What matter instead
are the form, the presentation, the material dimensions of the work, and their inter-
actions on the concrete plane of the page. Seen this way, the *Calender* is designedly
hollow at the center. It represents the young Spenser's polemic against the over-
worked standpoints and stale conventions of his time. And it argues for a new
poetry that would incorporate the sound- and wordplay, the self-criticism, and the
dialogic imperative of the roundelay between Willie and Perigot. [Stephen Burt,
Eve Herzog]

8. ———. "August," *The Shepheardes Calender*, London, 1597 [STC 23093],
     p. 61.

For this 1597 edition of *The Shepheardes Calender*—the last of the five quarto edi-
tions published in Spenser's lifetime—in the fourth line of the singing contest be-
tween Willie and Perigot, the former calls their collaborative roundelay a "round
delay": an implicit acknowledgment that the material poem, as here, is a perfect
poetic object that slows discursive time.

9. Thomas Watson, Passions 80 and 81, *Hekatompathia, or Passionate Centurie of Love*, London, 1582 [STC 25118a], sigs. K4ᵛ–L1ʳ.

Watson's *Hekatompathia* inaugurated the English boom in Petrarchan sonnet sequences of the 1580s and 1590s. Its speaker overcomes his lovesickness in poem 81 with a charm, in the form of a "Pasquine Piller," that works against infatuation: "amare est insanire" (Latin for "to love is to be insane" / "inspired"), the pillar announces in acrostic and telestic fashion, while the body of the poem departs from English to mutter a curse in Italian ("[a] Cypria la nemica miA," or "Retire, my enemy Love, to Cyprus"). As the accompanying instructions (numbered 80 in place of a sonnet) indicate, the pillar is actually a deliberate ritual designed to cast love out of the speaker, the sequence, and the reader. Materiality here is a strategy to get everyone literally and figuratively on the same page — "a path that / shall not leade awrie" (81, lines 18–19).

10. George Puttenham, "A generall resemblance of the Roundell to God, the world and the Queene," *The Arte of English Poesie*, London, 1589 [STC 20519], p. 81.

Written perhaps ten years before it was published, Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* is one of the most authoritative works of literary theory of the Renaissance. Book One concerns the origins and cultural applications of poetry; the second book, "proportion poeticall" (including the properties and uses of materiality); and Book Three, ornament (which allows Puttenham to theorize the coincidences of figurative language and other types of dissembling, for instance in a courtly setting). Most recent critics of the *Arte of English Poesie* avoid Book Two as though it were only a bizarre digression into shaped verses and metrical esoterica.

There is nothing vulgar or obvious about Puttenham's explanation of the roundell, however. This is a form that can be drawn in a sketch and described in non-concrete verse, but cannot be realized within the *Arte* itself: it is ideal, its perfect representation of "God, the world and the Queene" too difficult to achieve in actual poetry. Like its objects, such a poem, if it existed, would be "single, sans peere, simple, and one." Spenser's roundelay in the "August" eclogue might be viewed as another contemporaneous instance of a program for poetry articulated through a highly physical inflection: if a poem like that one could be realized in one poet's work rather than under the special conditions of a singing contest, if the roundell could be made and not merely indicated, Spenser and Puttenham are arguing, English poetry would be renewed by a fresh charter between materiality and meaning. [Jamie Ciocco]

11. Moses Cordovero, ["Composition Around the Ineffable Name"], *Pardes Rimmonim* (Hebrew), Cracow, 1591 [Heb 7027.535*], foldout at back.

For Cordovero (1522–1570), "the best example of a systematic thinker ever to appear among Kabbalists," language has a divine function.[7] These philosophers and mystics of the early modern period explored the intersections between the material and the metaphysical dimensions of language; their work is characterized by an

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[7] Harold Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism* (New York: Continuum 1984), p. 32.

affirmative attitude towards language as an instrument of God. As Gershom Scholem relates Cordovero's understanding of the Torah, for instance:

> he starts from the assumption that the Torah in its innermost essence is composed of divine letters, which themselves are configurations of divine light. Only in the course of a process of materialization do these letters combine in various ways. First they form names, that is, names of God, later appellatives and predicates suggesting the divine, and still later they combine in a new way, to form words relating to earthly events and material objects. Our present world took on its crude material character in consequence of the fall of man, and the Torah underwent a parallel change. The spiritual letters became material when the material character of the world made this change necessary.[8]

In Cordovero's "Composition" from *Pardes Rimmonim* ("The Garden of Pomegranates"), the four letters of God's name, the tetragrammaton, are inscribed in the middle of a circle, from which radiate lines linked into various permutations. [Carol Margolis]

12. Juan Díaz Rengifo, "Aquinas," *Arte Poética Española*, Barcelona, 1726 [Span 4148.7★], foldout at pp. 184–85.

Catering to the early modern taste for poetic handbooks, Díaz Rengifo's *Arte Poética Española*, first published in 1592, treats a variety of poetic forms, offering instructions, examples, and lists of rhyming words for novices. One of Díaz's examples is "Aquinas," which he calls a "labyrinto cúbico," a material poem in the form of a maze-like game that communicates enigmatic, "divine" meanings. Díaz notes that a labyrinth "signifies a house or prison, with so many streets and turns that, upon entering it, one becomes lost and is uncertain of where the door is and where one entered." Like other such poems, he insists, "Aquinas" can be "read in many ways, and from whatever part," as an acrostic, a mesostic, and a telestic text. Beginning with the letter *R* (which diagonally bisects the poem) we may read it backwards or forwards, up or down, to the right or to the left, but we always retrace the couplet: "Thomas soars in flight / To form a sky." The poem gives material form to Thomas Aquinas's mysteries and contradictions as a Christian martyr, his death but also his eternal life, his mortal "fall" and his immortal "flight." [Tamara Ketabgian]

13. Henry Lok, ["Square Poem in Honor of Elizabeth I"], *Sundry Christian Passions*, London, 1597 [STC 16696], pp. ii–iii.

Lok was one of the most prolific, though not one of the best English lyric poets of the sixteenth century, writing hundreds of devotional sonnets. Of this text Thomas P. Roche, Jr. writes: "It is a square poem, ten lines of ten syllables. . . . It can be read as a poem, pure and simple, not so good if read so, but a miracle of construction if one considers that Lok wants us also to read the poem as a St. George's cross, †, a St. Andrew's cross, X, two pillars, five squares within squares, with many accruing benefits of turning a poem into an acrostic. . . . [The poem is] a realization of philosophic truths in which he believed as did the Queen whom he was honoring."[9]

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8 Gershom G. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), p. 71.

9 Thomas P. Roche, Jr., *Petrarch and the English Sonnet Sequences* (New York: AMS Press, 1989), pp. 165–66. See also pp. 549–52.

184 ¶¶¶

AL SOL DE LA IGLESIA

SANTO THOMAS DE AQUINO LABYRINTO CUBICO,
que por todas partes, empezando siempre por la, *R*,
contiene el siguiente Pareado.

Remontò Thomàs su buelo,
Que pudo formar un cielo.

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RemontòThomàsfubueloQuepudoformaruncielo
eRemontòThomàsfubueloQuepudoformarunciel
meRemontòThomàsfubueloQuepudoformaruncie
omeRemontòThomàsfubueloQuepudoformarunci
nomeRemontòThomàsfubueloQuepudoformarunc
tnomeRemontòThomàsfubueloQuepudoformarun
òtnomeRemontòThomàsfubueloQuepudoformaru
TòtnomeRemontòThomàsfubueloQuepudoformar
hTòtnomeRemontòThomàsfubueloQuepudoforma
ohTòtnomeRemontòThomàsfubueloQuepudoform
mohTòtnomeRemontòThomàsfubueloQuepudofor
àmohTòtnomeRemontòThomàsfubueloQuepudofo
sàmohTòtnomeRemontòThomàsfubueloQuepudof
fsàmohTòtnomeRemontòThomàsfubueloQuepudo
ufsàmohTòtnomeRemontòThomàsfubueloQuepud
bufsàmohTòtnomeRemontòThomàsfubueloQuepu
ubufsàmohTòtnomeRemontòThomàsfubueloQuep
eubufsàmohTòtnomeRemontòThomàsfubueloQue
leubufsàmohTòtnomeRemontòThomàsfubueloQu
oleubufsàmohTòtnomeRemontòThomàsfubueloQ
QoleubufsàmohTòtnomeRemontòThomàsfubuelo
uQoleubufsàmohTòtnomeRemontòThomàsfubuel
euQoleubufsàmohTòtnomeRemontòThomàsfubue
peuQoleubufsàmohTòtnomeRemontòThomàsfubu
upeuQoleubufsàmohTòtnomeRemontòThomàsfub
dupeuQoleubufsàmohTòtnomeRemontòThomàsfu
odupeuQoleubufsàmohTòtnomeRemontòThomàsf
fodupeuQoleubufsàmohTòtnomeRemontòThomàs
ofodupeuQoleubufsàmohTòtnomeRemontòThoma
rofodupeuQoleubufsàmohTòtnomeRemontòThom
mrofodupeuQoleubufsàmohTòtnomeRemontòTho
amrofodupeuQoleubufsàmohTòtnomeRemontòTh
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nuramrofodupeuQoleubufsmohTòtnomeRemont
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icnuramrofodupeuQoleubufsàmohTòtnomeRemo
eicnuramrofodupeuQoleubufsàmohTòtnomeRem
leicnuramrofodupeuQoleubufsàmohTòtnomeRe
oleicnuramrofodupeuQoleubufsàmohTòtnomeR
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Item 12. Juan Diaz Rengifo, "Aquinas," Arte Poética Española, Barcelona, 1726.

A Square in verſe of a hundred monaſillables only:

Deſcribing the cauſe of Englands happineſſe.

God	hath	pourd	forth	Rare	Grace	On	this	Ile-	And
Makes	Crownd	your	rule	Queene	In	the	ſame	ſo	ſtill
kings	laud	THis	ſaint	Faire	that	with	truth	doth	ſtand
Rule	ſo	long	time	milde	Prince	ioy	land	it	will
For	proofe	you	ſhowes	wiſe	of	earths	race	whome	There
Heauēs	haue	vp	held	Iuſt	choice	whome	God	thus	ſheildr
Your	ſtocke	of	Kings	worlds	rich	of	ſpring	and	feare
States	fame	Known	farre	Praiſe	Ile	which	All	bliſſe	yeilds
Hold	God	there	fore	ſore	ſtay	of	all	the	Beſt
Bleſt	is	your	raigne	Here	Builds	ſweet	Peace	true	Reſt

The Square plainely ſet downe.

GOd hath powr'd forth rare grace on this Ile, and
Makes crown'd your rule, Queene in the ſame ſo ſtill,
Kings laud this Saint faire, that with truth doth ſtand,
Rule ſo long time mild Prince, ioy land it will.
For proofe you ſhowes, wiſe of earths race whom there
Heauens haue vpheld. Iuſt choyce whom God thus ſhields,
Your ſtocke of kings (worlds rich offspring and feare,
States fame knowne farre) praiſe Ile which all bliſſe yeelds.
Hold God therefore ſure ſtay, and port the beſt;
Bleſt is your raigne, here builds ſweet peace, true reſt.

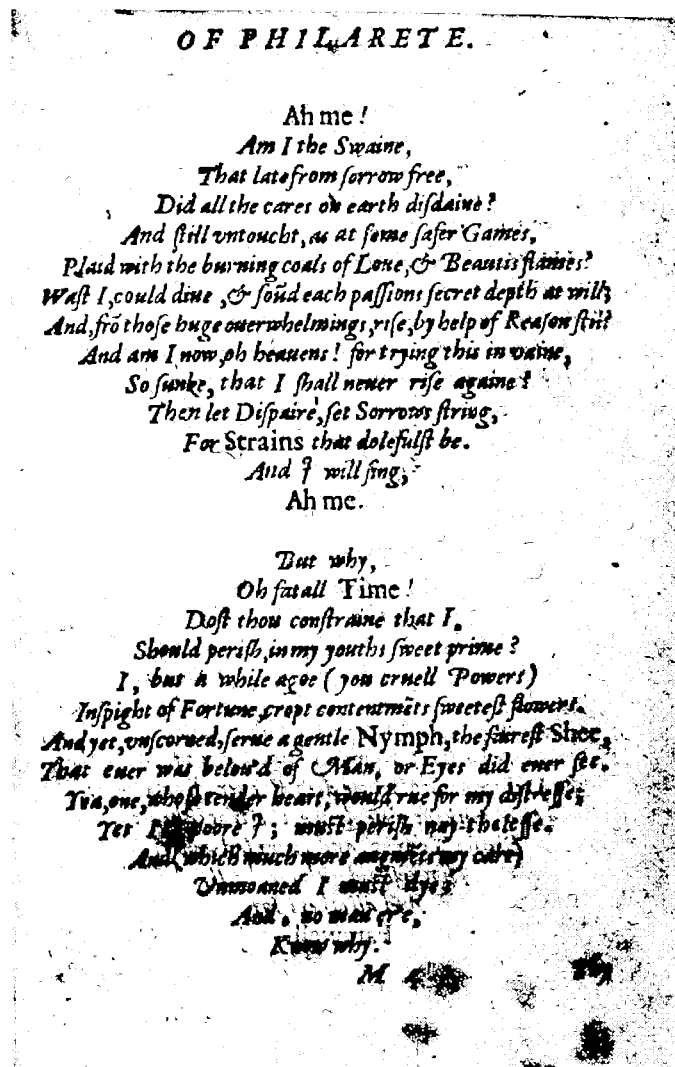*Item 13. Henry Lok. ["Square Poem in Honor of Elizabeth I"]. Sundry Christian Passions. London, 1597.*

14. William Shakespeare, Sonnet 9, *Sonnets*, London, 1609 [STC 22353], sig. B2ᵛ.

Helen Vendler notices, and speculates on, the insistent play on the letter *w* in Shakespeare's Sonnet 9. "This 'Fantasy on the Letter *W*,' as it should be entitled, arises from Shakespeare's fascinated observation of the shape of the word *widdow* (the Quarto spelling)."[10] *W* says, of course, "double you," the argument of this section of the collection addressed to an unmarried young man.

15. George Wither, "Phil'arete's Lament," *Faire-Virtue, The Mistresse of Phil'arete*, London, 1622 [STC 25903], sig. M4ʳ.

The shepherd Phil'arete woos a lady by breaking into a shaped song.

[10] Helen Vendler, from her book in progress on the *Sonnets*.

OF PHILARETE.

Ah me!
Am I the Swaine,
That late from sorrow free,
Did all the cares on earth disdaine?
And still vntoucht, as at some safer Games,
Plaid with the burning coals of Loue, & Beauties flames?
Wast I, could diue , & soūd each passions secret depth at will;
And frō those huge ouerwhelmings, rise, by help of Reason still?
And am I now, oh heauens! for trying this in vaine,
So sunke, that I shall neuer rise againe?
Then let Dispaire, set Sorrows striug,
For Strains that dolefulst be.
And I will sing,
Ah me.

But why,
Oh fatall Time!
Dost thou constraine that I,
Should perish, in my youths sweet prime?
I, but a while agoe (you cruell Powers)
Inspight of Fortune, crept contentmēts sweetest flowers.
And yet, vnscorued, serue a gentle Nymph, the farest Shee,
That euer was belou'd of Man, or Eyes did euer see.
Yea, one, whose tender heart, would rue for my distresse;
Yet [...]ioore? ; must perish, nay the lesse.
And which much more my [...]
Vnmoaned I must [...]
And , so must dye,
Know why.

M

16. George Herbert, "The Altar," *The Temple*, Cambridge, 1633 [STC 13183 (A)], p. 18.

A member of a distinguished political and literary family, George Herbert (1593–1633) wrote *The Temple* in the last years of his life. He studied at Cambridge University, was named Public Orator there and elected a Member of Parliament, but chose to spend the last years of his life as a country priest in Bemerton.

The content of *The Temple* reflects Herbert's pious life and deep religious devotion. Its poems, which tell of a symbolic journey into and through a church and the Christian calendar, seem simple and conventional at first glance, but carry out one of the most thoroughgoing experiments with materiality in Renaissance poetics. [Edwin Outwater]

17. ————. "Easter Wings," *The Temple*, Cambridge, 1633 [STC 13183 (B)], pp. 34–35.

"Easter Wings" appears at the end of a cycle of poems concerning Holy Week. It is a hieroglyph, or a figure holding both hidden and manifest meanings in some urgent relation. A passage from Isaiah ("they that wait upon the Lord . . . shall

mount up with wings as eagles," 40:31) echoes in the title and concept, along with
Malachi 4:2 ("But unto you that fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise
with healing in his wings"). The plain sense of the poem describes spiritual growth
through suffering and affliction, the lines expand and contract in response to
Herbert's narrative of spiritual evolution, and the poem's religious paradox, that
the "fall [shall] further the flight in me," is enforced by a horizontal reading of the
wings: the fall of the longest lines allows the shape of the wings to be apprehended.
Moreover, Herbert distinguishes the poem's ultimate statement, the wings, from
the process that realizes them—that is, in order for one to look at the wings hori-
zontally, the lines of the poem must be vertical and unreadable. Thus Herbert keeps
his hieroglyph in sight while leaving the substance that realizes it unavailable ex-
cept to a changed perspective—in other words, our literally moving the book, or
ourselves, to a different position. [Edwin Outwater]

18. Jacques Gaffarel, *Curiositez Inouyez, sur a Sculpture Talismanique des Persans, Horo-
scope des Patriarches, et Lecture des Estoilles*, Rouen, 1637 [24215.12*], title page.

19. ———. "Celestial Alphabet," *Unheard of Curiosities Concerning the Talismanic
Sculpture of the Persians, The Horoscopy of the Patriarchs, and the Reading of the Stars*,
trans. Edmund Chilmead, London, 1650 [24215.12.2*], foldout at back.

The Christian Kabbalist Gaffarel (1601–1681), Richelieu's librarian and an influ-
ential magus, follows the occultist Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535)
and the visionary Guillaume Postel (1510–1581) in developing a way to "read" the
night sky by identifying constellations of letters according to the Hebrew alphabet.
As Jerome Rothenberg observes, "the sky becomes a massive concrete poem,
whose words or 'messages' are constantly transforming."[11] The poem may be read
semantically, by connecting letters to form words; it may be read iconically, as a
visual representation of the heavens; but in both cases, the poem will constantly
change as the stars shift. [Carol Margolis]

20. Robert Herrick, "Crosse-Tree," *His Noble Numbers*, London, 1648 [STC
H1597], p. 77.

Herrick's devotional technopaegnion is one of many mid- and late seventeenth-
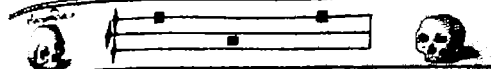century derivations from George Herbert's example in *The Temple*.

21. Juan Caramuel de Lobkowitz, "Maria Stella," *Primus calamus ob oculos ponens
metametricam quae variis currentium, recurrentium, abscendentium, descendentium nec
non circumvolantium versuum ductibus multiformes labyrinthos exornat*, Rome, 1663
[Class 4366.63F*], unpaginated section between pp. xxxx–1.

The Spanish Cistercian Caramuel's *Metametrica*, probably the most comprehensive
atlas of the material dimensions of poetry ever published, contains innumerable lists,
how-to guides, and demonstrations. "Maria Stella" is a permutational poem—the
reader is invited to carry out the changes—that displays potential variations in a
concentric arrangement. Other examples include a do-it-yourself tribute to
Aquinas and a labyrinth for Philip IV of Spain.

[11] Jerome Rothenberg, ed., *A Big Jewish Book: Poems and
Other Visions of the Jews From Tribal Times to Present*
(Garden City, New York: Anchor Books-Doubleday,
1978), p. 420.

TABVLA XX

DVOVS DVOVS

CON ! TE SI SION, YES QV'EL

Y A B C D

DE MI AMOR, O DE MI VIDA

ET ET

RO I S

IL 10 COMME P

Octaua. Nona. Decima.

Undecima Duodecima

SVSVS
VSESV
SEIES
VSESV
SVSVS

Sexta decima Tertia decima

Quarta decima

Quinta decima

CVBVS METAMETRICVS

Figura Septima decima

Figura Octaua decima

Metametricus characterum valor.
A — vv
B — v v
C —
D —
E —
F — vv
G — vv
H —

N.B.
Potest poni
G   H
vel — vv
vel — v

Author delineauit anno 1636

LOGOGRIPHORVM EXPOSITIO

I. Emendez-uous qu' attendez-uous la mort.
II. Mort la mis la mort.
III. Consuelate Corazon, si has passion, y espera, que el Mundo rueda.
IV. Lauro y corona a las letras:
V. De mi amor, o de mi uida sera fin.
VI. Et libri et gladij errores correximus Orbis.
VII. Il faut disne, comme souspe.
XIV. Soles (Sol es) coronare mire corona soles.
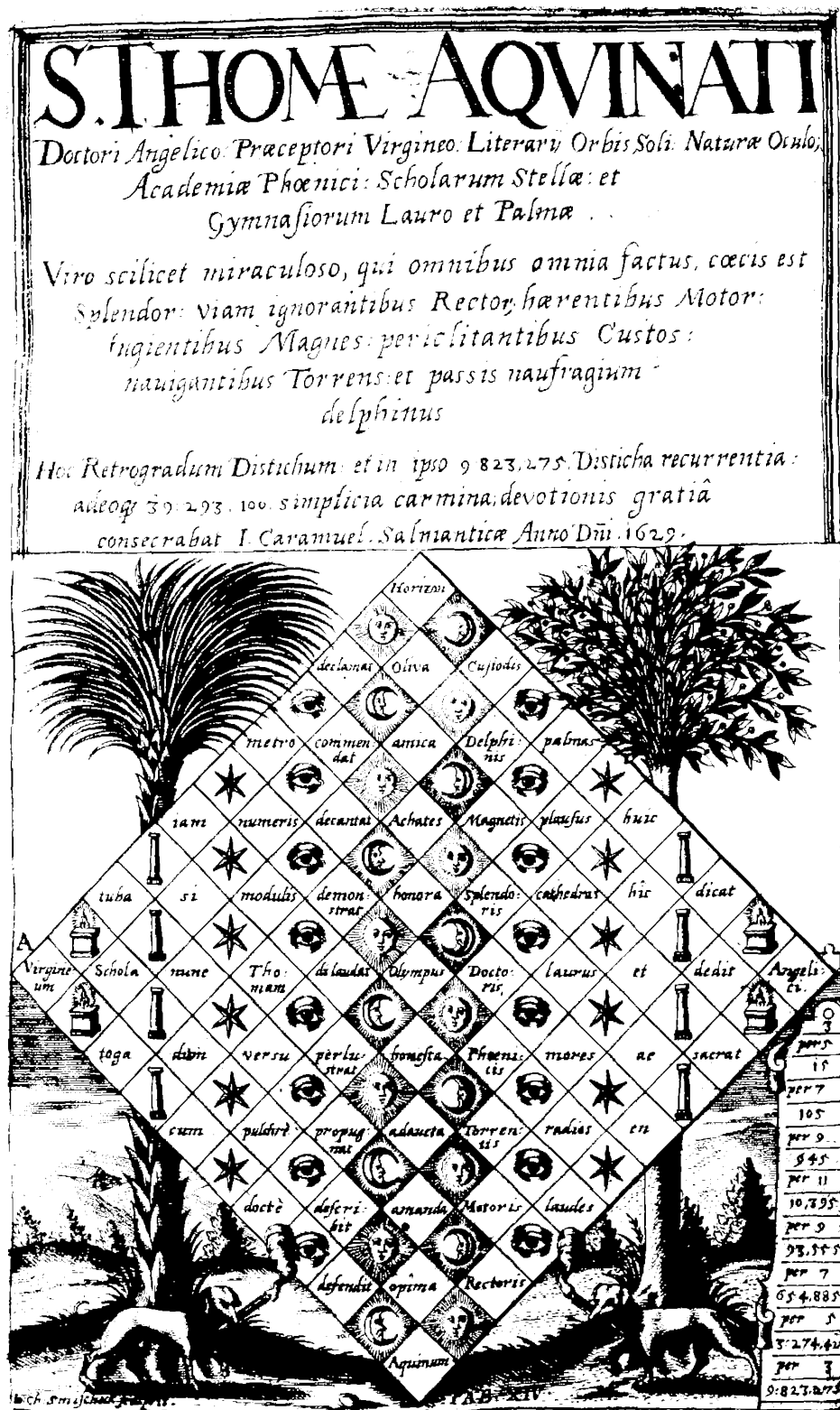
MARIA STELLA
CELEBRATA   LABYRINTHO
CONTINENTE

Diſticha retrograda,69,902:227,514: 327,040. id eſt uerſus ſimplices,279,608:910,057: 508,360.

Ideam [– ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ –] – – – [– ∪ ∪] – – [– ∪ ∪] – – – [– ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ –] inuenit I. Caramuel anno 1636.

Voces addidit RP. Nicolaus Lucenſis, Capucinus, Theologus, Concionator, Vir eruditiſſimus. anno 1649·

RP. HIPPOLYTO MARRACCIO LUCENSI E CONGR· CLER· REGULARIUM
MATRIS DEI PARTHENIARUM LAUDUM ENCOMIASTAE &c.

Obſeruantiæ gratia Satrianenſes Alumni conſecrabant anno 1662·
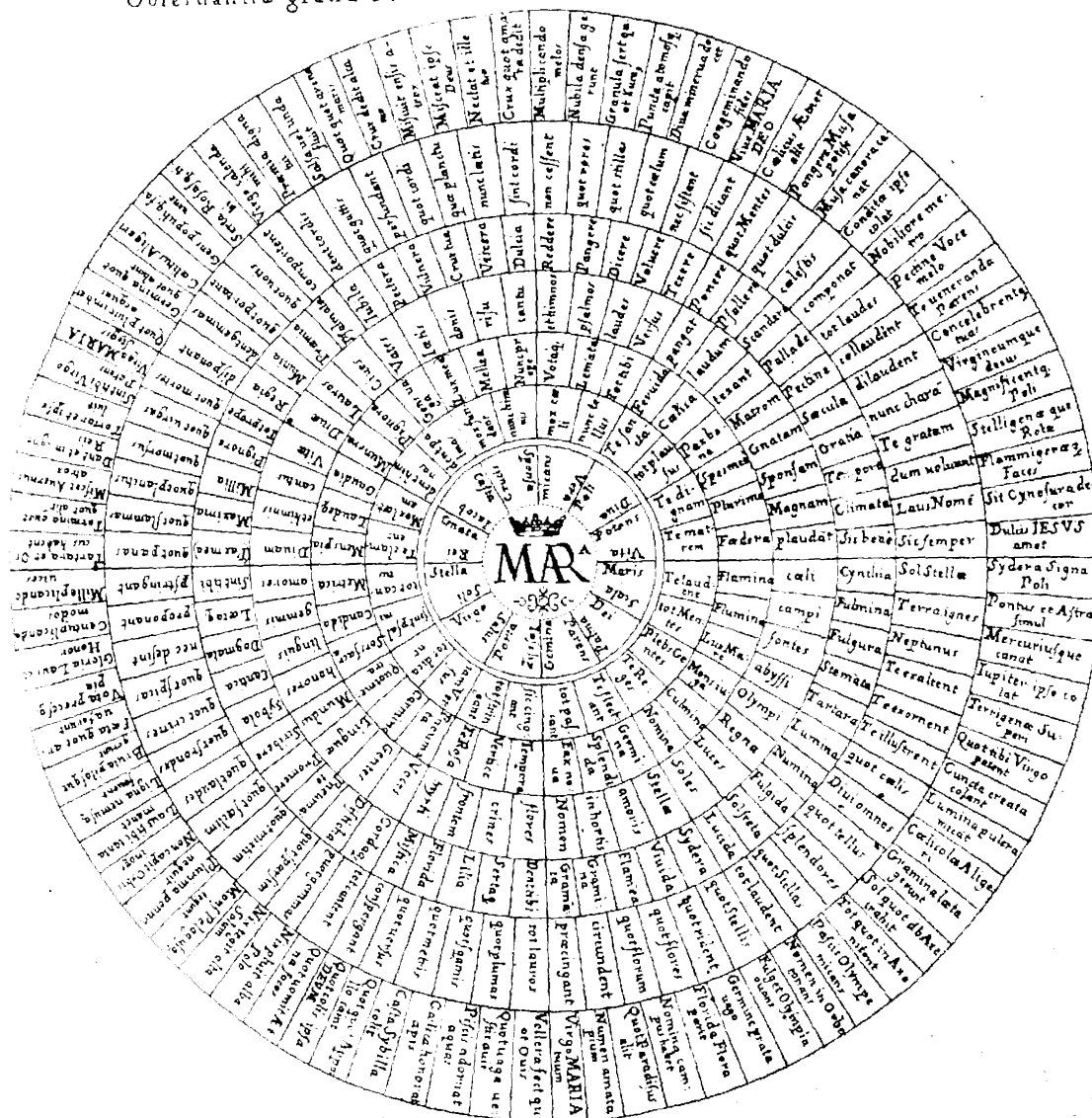
22. Anonymous, ["Soneto Pentacrostico" in honor of Philip V], n.p., circa 1711, loose pages.

This sonnet was written in praise of King Philip V of Spain following his victory in the War of the Spanish Succession. Its opening lines expound his qualities: "Valorous Philip, and hero strong / Spirited Hercules, brilliant lis." The fleur-de-lis is a symbol of kingship, its star-shape indicating power from a central source.

The most striking visual aspect of the poem is the fact that every line of verse ends with the letter *e*, and to show the importance of this device the poet has drawn a line linking the penultimate letter of every line to a single *e* on the right of the page. Here is the "lis brillante": the letter *e*, significantly the fifth letter of the alphabet, is the most critical part of the text, all the lines tending toward it. It is the source and goal of every line. Viewed from the right side, the poem is a flower whose petals grow upward from the *e*, and viewed from the left it is an archway, building to the stable keystone of the fifth letter.

But the poem could not simply portray Philip's rule as local or concentrated, with its power waning at the periphery. Hence the pentacrostic: there are five supports across the sonnet—including the all-completing *e*—that form pillars to unify the text vertically. Read sideways, the four capitalized lines announce: "In this happiest hour / the great Philip / returns to his court / to redeem us." [Jamie Ciocco]

PART TWO: THE RENAISSANCE OF MATERIAL POETRY

23. Augusto de Campos, *Poetamenos*, São Paulo: Edições Invenção, 1973.

The programmatic *poesia concreta* of the Noigandres poets of Brazil—the brothers Augusto de Campos and Haroldo de Campos, and Décio Pignatari—opened the way for an international theory and practice of concreteness in the 1950s and after: a renaissance of material poetry. The six color-poems and manifesto of the series *Poetamenos* (1953) are the first self-identified texts of the Brazilian movement. Based on the *Klangfarbenmelodie* of Anton Webern, these poems demand multiple voices—sometimes differentiated by gender, level of consciousness, or other modes—to represent "chromatic reality." In the manifesto that accompanies the first edition, Campos imagines further technological possibilities from the vantage of a Third World society in the 1950s: "but luminous or film letters, if we only had them!" Though Brazil remains unevenly developed, Campos now has such means, and as he remarks in the interview ("From Dante to the Post-Concrete") in this issue of the *Bulletin*, some of his recent poetry is realized through video, computer graphics, holography, and other "luminous" media.

24. Charles Olson, *The Maximus Poems*, ed. George F. Butterick, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983 [PS3529.L655.M3.1983], pp. 150-51.

Olson's *The Maximus Poems* (1953–70) is maximal in size and ambition. The 600-odd-page "modern epic" poem relates the origin, history, geography, and folklore of the fishing town of Gloucester, Massachusetts. Deriving much of its technique from Ezra Pound's *Cantos* (1921–72) and William Carlos Williams's *Paterson*

(1946–62), Olson's *Maximus* ultimately quarrels with both; the latter answers Pound's attempts to encompass all of history with Williams's localism, and Williams's collage of anecdotes and images with insistent moral and political theses à la Pound. Olson's epic is finally a means of instruction, a series of explanatory letters in which alienated modern readers can recover *polis*, the integrated, rooted, and self-sufficient community Olson images Gloucester to have been.

As an important part of his aim in *The Maximus Poems*, Olson brings into play the physical aspects of the project. Lines and stanzas have noteworthy indentations, lineations, typefaces, and even angles with respect to the edge of the page. Words, lines, and stanzas take their place in the poem's organization not in the one-dimensional realm of speech, where poems can be recited apart from their authors, rearranged, and apprehended literally anywhere, but in the two- and three-dimensional space of pages and books, where syllables and morphemes cannot be separated from their spatial situations without the violence of scissors and paste. Though Olson's early essay "Projective Verse" (1950) had defended his all-over-the-page writing as directly expressive of aural form, many of the spatial tricks of *The Maximus Poems* have no obvious aural manifestations.[12] Olson places one- or four-line poems alone in various (and therefore significant) places on a page, includes several entirely blank leaves, prints diagonal lines connecting blocks of text, and disperses some text across the page at different angles in direct imitation of a two-dimensional map. All of these features tie our experience of the poem to the printed page in unexpected ways; as readers we enact Olson's prescriptions for a physical, local, and relational understanding of knowledge and society — in this case, the "republic" of language that comprises the maplike poem. [Stephen Burt]

25. Décio Pignatari, "terra," *Poesia Pois É*, São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1977 [PQ9697.P48.P6.x.1977], p. [115].

In this famous instance of the first phase of Brazilian concrete poetry — "terra" was composed in 1956, and first published in *Noigandres* 5 (1962) — Pignatari makes a concrete version of the georgic, a traditionally didactic genre about farm life, husbandry, and rural values.

Haroldo de Campos offers this reading of Pignatari's poem:

> A typical meta-poem. . . . Its structure is based on the repetition of only one word — *terra* (earth) — as it occurs [as though] with letters of a newsreel on a luminous screen. This word is fragmented until the production (line 7) of a kind of "error" — the duplication of the syllable *ra* (terr / *ara*). This self-correcting error feeds back the machine-poem (like in cybernetics), and gives it its semantical optimum level. By this process, the poem engenders phrases like *ara a terra* (ploughs the land), *ter rara terra* (to have a rare land), *errar a terra* (to be mistaken about the land), *terra ara terra* (land ploughs land) and, implicitly, *terra terra* ([a Portuguese idiom for] a plain thing). All these syntagmatic elements converge to the semantic matrix of the poem: the idea of a self-regulating poem, like a rare land which ploughs itself, and the creative "error" (*errar* = [both] to make a mistake and to roam). Visually, this concrete "georgic" is reinforced by the blanks reproducing the furrows of the plough.[13] [Gary Schmidt]

[12] Charles Olson, "Projective Verse," *The Poetics of the New American Poetry*, ed. Donald Allen and Warren Tallman (New York: Grove Press, 1973), pp. 147–58.

[13] *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, ed. Emmett Williams (New York: Something Else Press, 1967), p. 248.

26. Bob Brown, *1450–1950*, Paris: Black Sun Press, 1929 [*65-1709], [p. 1].

The title of Bob Brown's lively book of poems, *1450–1950*, indicates that he was aware of the bond between early modern poets and printers ("GUTENBERG–CAXTON–BOCCACCIO–RABELAIS–SHAKESPEARE") and those of the present ("STEIN–JOYCE . . . AND MYSELF"). Like "the monks who illuminated manuscripts," Brown published his poems in his own handwriting, complete with sketches and side notes (or "vignettes"). This spontaneous mingling of words and images ensures the inseparability of the text from its material dimensions. The book begins with a gentle play on George Herbert's *The Temple*, in which Herbert presents a preliminary section ("The Church–Porch") that serves much the same purpose as Brown's "Welcome To My Mosque."

Although Robert Carlton Brown (1886–1959) had published most of his books before the period (1950 and after) described in this exhibition as the renaissance of material poetry, he was rediscovered and republished under the sign of that revival. *1450–1950* was reissued in 1959 by Jargon Books, an important source of avant-garde writing of that era. The text for the Widener display is the first edition, in a copy that belonged to E.E. Cummings. [Sue Walters]

27. ———, comp. *Readies for Bob Brown's Machine*, Cagnes-sur-Mer: Roving Eye Press, 1931 [*AC9.B8147.931r], pp. 184–85.

In the *Readies*, Bob Brown proposed a machine that would enable its user to read words moving before his or her eyes rather than stationary type that the eyes must move across. He imagined that the machine would quickly become as popular as the "talkies" (an invention of the same moment, from which he adapted the name "readies" for his device), and would revolutionize both reading and writing. The machine would project words off tiny film rolls onto a translucent screen, rolling the tape at any speed convenient to the reader. Brown originally conceived the invention as a way of increasing reading speed and saving book-printing expenses, but the larger implications of the device lie in its potential effects on artistic expression.

The readie is as unlike both the spoken and the printed word as holography is unlike both film and sculpture. The readie is temporal like the spoken word, and visual like print: it is seen, not heard—but once seen it is gone. Printed poetry and prose are variably temporal. While we often read at a uniform pace from beginning to end, we are always free to pause, to reread certain passages, to read out of order. Moreover, a printed poem can be seen at a single glance, and we can choose our desired position from the totality of the text before us. Brown's machine would reduce this two-dimensional freedom to one: we could only move forward and backward through a readie, and could never get an instantaneous vision of the totality of the work as object.

What effects would this technology have on writing? Brown argues that the machine would revitalize a tired language, "useless words will go out for a long walk and never come back into the reading language again . . . OUT." But as the many writers in *Readies for Bob Brown's Machine* demonstrate, the invention could have effects far wider than the simple acceleration and modernization of the written word. Repetition would find a new place in the aesthetic of written poetry, for as the tape spins inexorably by, crucial words must be repeated often, like choruses in sung poetry, if their significance to the evolving text is to be kept in mind. Pageless presentation would remove the line-break from the poet's repertoire of

MY MOSQUE
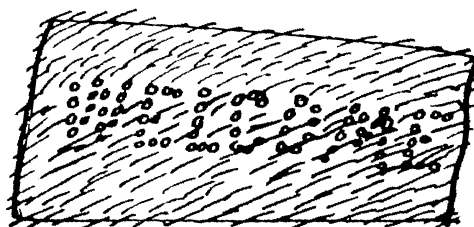
PLEASE WIPE
YOUR MUDDY MIND
BEFORE ENTERING.

AND LEAVE YOUR
THICK
CEREBRAL SHOES
OUTSIDE

meaning-making devices, but a new one would replace it: by combining two words that share letters, the poet could create a unit that as it moved through the viewing window would reveal first its initial, then its subsequent meanings in an unbroken stream.

Some of the experiments of the international concrete movement—see Décio Pignatari's poem "terra" in this exhibition—share in part or in whole Brown's insights into poetic renovation. [Jason Innes]

28. Louis Zukofsky, "Julia's Wild," *Bottom: On Shakespeare*, 2 vols., Austin: The Ark Press, 1963 [Lamont POETRY ST847.2], 1:393.

On an invitation by the poet Cid Corman, Zukofsky "ring[s] a change" on a line out of Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (Act 4, Scene 4, line 197). Zukofsky's methodical defamiliarization of six common words, frozen in their original moods, tenses, and numbers, opens the possibility of a sensual experience specific to poetry, where pleasure can be derived from the interplay of immediate sound and a more distant but recoverable sense. In the last two lines, Zukofsky restores the message to its original order. [Sue Walters]

29. Ilse and Pierre Garnier, "marie," *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, ed. Emmett Williams, New York: Something Else Press, 1967 [Lit 2835.10.5], p. 120.

Where Caramuel's poem on the Virgin Mary is almost endlessly permutational, the Garniers turn out a text with one word only; the rectangular shape of the stanza is "solid" and definite, while the diamond shape carved out of the center is softly defined. [Scott Cole]

30. Pedro Xisto, "Epithalamium II" and "Epithalamium III," *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, ed. Mary Ellen Solt, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970 [Lit 2835.10.35], pp. 114–15.

In *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), George Puttenham describes the epithalamium as a ballad in three parts, sung by musicians to celebrate "the bedding of the bride." In the first part, the musicians and others who came to honor the marriage would stand outside the bridal chamber and play loud, shrill songs "to the intent there might no noise be hard out of the bed chamber by the skreeking and outcry of the young damosell feeling the first forces of her stiffe and rigorous young man." The tenor of this first part of the song was to congratulate the couple and wish them well. The second part, at midnight, was "to refresh the faint and weried bodies and spirits, and to animate new appetites with cherefull wordes, encoraging them to the recontinuance of the same entertainments." Finally, in the morning, "the same Musicians came againe with this last part, and greeted them both with a Psalme of new applausions, for that they had either of them so well behaved them selves that night."[14]

One cannot imagine reciting or singing Xisto's "Epithalamium II." The poet offers a bilingual gloss on the semantic pun at the heart of his transformed epithalamium. When read in English, Xisto's poem—an example of the self-styled

genre he calls the "logogram"—is defined by the words contained in it: *he, she,* and the half-formed ampersand produce a semiotic epithalamium, a perfect marriage within the sign. Xisto then adduces an alternative reading: by considering the letters themselves as standing for Portuguese words, we find that man / Adam (*homem*) is divided from *Eva* by the *serpente*. With three symbols, Xisto creates an ironic marriage-song that highlights both marriage and separation.

Xisto's "Epithalamium III," first published in the fifth issue of the Brazilian journal *Invenção* (1967), takes us further and more abstractly into the semiotics of a single letter. Lines of varying darkness, at right angles to suggest the letter *L*, collapse into the center in what appears more like a work of Op Art than a poem. However, the poem's bilingual gloss helps again. At the beginning and end of the legend we have, respectively, the English and Portuguese words for *labyrinth*, which approximates the poem's structure. As one goes inward, *love* and *life* are positionally equivalent to *logos* (word) and *leito* (bed). In the legend, these abstract concepts finally meet in the center—an unadorned *L*. Xisto may be suggesting, as the object of this epithalamium, the most fundamental wedding of all: that of one signifier with another, a marriage that generates the word of logocentric Western culture and makes "love" and "life" possible. [Gary Schmidt]

31. Edwin Morgan, "orgy," *The Second Life*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968 [23701.75.2100], p. 28.

"Orgy" is an unusual concrete poem in that it has a plot like that of a children's book. The story relies heavily on the sounds of the repeated words and phrases to fashion sound-images, which then produce visual images in the reader's mind.

An anteater canters out one day in search of the crunchy little black insects it loves to munch. The rhythm of the words *canter* and *anteater* provokes a picture of the side-to-side wobbling of the anteater as it drags its nose along. From the two-syllable *canter* to the three-syllable *anteater,* Morgan brings us to the inevitable, four-syllable *ant encounter* and the five-syllable *antenna react,* at which point the anteater stops abruptly. Four rows of "ants" represent the veritable gold mine our anteater has found. There are so many ants here, the anteater "can't count" them all; in fact, it would have to be "an accountant" anteater to count so many ants. All it wants is to "eat eat eat." After the anteater has "eaten" its fill, it tastes the sweet "nectar" of the bountiful meal in its mouth, and enters a glutton's "trance." It thinks to itself: I "can't eat an ant, not an[other] ant." The anteater is "o [so] content" with its meal, it will not "canter" one more step in this ant-full, tranced state. [Scott Cole]

32. ———. "pomander," *The Second Life*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968 [Lamont POETRY PR6063.O69.A17.x.1982], p. 45.

According to the dictionary definition (*Webster's Ninth*), a *pomander* is "a mixture of aromatic substances enclosed in a perforated bag or box and used to scent clothes and linens or formerly carried as a guard against infection." Like a pomander, this poem—first published here in *The Second Life*—is a compound of elements. Once the word *pomander* is "open[ed]," all of the ingredients spill out to reveal not only what makes up the pomander, but all the subconstituents that make up the various ingredients.

In the category of an "open poem," there are poems about him, poems about her, hymns that are sung in church, Greek mythological poetry about Hymen (the god of marriage) and Leander (the young man who swam the Hellespont to meet his lover Hero): all these are the results of the "meander[ing]" of some intellectual or "high man['s] pen." All the while, Morgan plays with shared sounds between words of different meanings (him and hymn; hymen and high man; open and o pen). As Morgan spills out more of the elements contained in the original "pomander," he moves away from traditional motifs, toward such refashionings as "holy panhandler," "banned peon," "bamboo pond," and "panda hamper." The Buddhist mantra "om mane padme hum" suggests that material poetry can open onto religious experience. Above all, Morgan demonstrates the elasticity of language and the playfulness that goes into creating an open poem: "happy are we open." [Scott Cole]

33. Octavio Paz, *Discos Visuales*, drawings by Vicente Rojo, 4 parts ("Juventud," "Pasaje," "Concorde," "Aspa"), Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1968 [XF 256], Disco 1 (showing "el salto de la ola").

The first of Paz's collection of "visual records" or "discs," "Juventud" ("Youth") simulates cyclical patterns such as the fall of a wave, the progress of life, and the passage of time. With its moving windows and the changing text beneath them, the poem rotates from "the leap of a wave / more white" ("el salto de la ola / mas blanco") to "each hour / more green" ("cada hora / mas verde") to "each day / more young" ("cada día / mas joven") until it ends with "death" ("la muerte"). Paz groups "Juventud" with several other records, all of which center on natural phenomena such as water, woods, lovemaking, and the body.

As the medium on which Paz "plays" his text, the *Discos Visuales* serve as poem–things, as games, and as technological products. Through them, Paz enacts the dynamic between nature and technology: they mediate the reader–viewer's relation to Paz's written text, just as his language in turn mediates natural events. Elsewhere Paz writes that "technology comes between us and the world, it closes every prospect from view: beyond its geometries of iron, glass, or aluminum there is exactly nothing, except the unknown, the region of the formless that is not yet transformed by man."[15] [Tamara Ketabgian]

34. Emmett Williams, "Meditation no. 2" and "Meditation no. 3," *Selected Shorter Poems 1950–1970*, New York: New Directions, 1975 [Lamont POETRY PS3573.I449.A6.1975], pp. 80–81.

These grids, in many ways typical of the international concrete aesthetic of the mid-1960s, disclose their historical dimension when displayed adjacent to Hrabanus Maurus's *carmina*, Díaz's "Aquinas," and Johanna Drucker's *The Word Made Flesh*.

35. John Ashbery, "Litany," *As We Know*, New York: Viking Press, 1979 [Lamont POETRY PS3501.S475.A95], pp. 36–37.

[15] Octavio Paz, *The Bow and the Lyre*, trans. Ruth L.C. Simms (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1956), p. 241.

The first poem in Ashbery's eighth book, "Litany" occupies sixty-six pages in two vertical columns. The column on the left is in roman type, that on the right in italics. The poem is preceded by an instruction for readers: the two columns of "Litany" are "meant to be read as simultaneous but independent monologues." In other poems that are physically easier to read than "Litany," Ashbery allows "an open field of narrative possibilities" by using suggestively ambiguous images, scenes, and phrases.[16] His poems usually make sense in ways that defy strictly logical or linear thinking. And yet images and phrases do connect, forming meaningful eddies of poetic language. In "Litany," another dimension of possibility — the reification of discursive spaces — is added to the poem's operations. There is no obvious or easy solution to the problem of reading the two columns simultaneously and independently.

Ashbery's choice of the word *simultaneous* is revealing. Simultaneity is a concept applicable only to events that are time-bound; but silent reading is not time-bound, for we are always free to re-read, to skip ahead, to linger over a passage or to stop reading for any period of time — or forever. Most conventional texts simulate temporality by moving along a linear path built not only of words moving unproblematically down single columns but of ideas, themes, characters, chains of events: they thereby avoid confronting us with the fact that two separate pieces of writing cannot be apprehended at once. Ashbery's experiment amounts to a critical perspective on this sort of conventional temporality. His two columns are not simultaneous in the way that two events are simultaneous, but concurrent as two permanent objects are. In "Litany" we discover the constructed quality of textual temporality, as well as our own freedom to construct it. [Devon Eastland, Jason Innes]

36. Johanna Drucker, *Against Fiction*, Oakland: Druckwerk, 1983 [courtesy of the Bow and Arrow Press], pp. [36–37].

The earliest text by Drucker included in the exhibition is *Against Fiction*, a large book bound in black stock. Its portfolio format and black lettering of different sizes immediately suggest a newspaper, perhaps a tabloid, Sunday magazine, or even a scandal sheet. (Twenty-five of the 125 copies made were actually printed on newsprint.) Moreover, the grainy woodcut illustrations are reminiscent of black-and-white television screens. Text-heavy, all black, the book uses a newspaper format to critique the media; simultaneously, the text declares itself to be against fiction, a medium itself seemingly against the "fact" of a newspaper.

Over its two-page spreads, *Against Fiction* makes reading problematic, not only by varying print sizes but by accentuating morphemes and words-within-words. One page of pure text allows for several different readings: if we read all the large headlines we get one message or logic, while under each of the headlines follows type of various weights and textures that can be read straight through or hierarchized, at the reader's will. Ultimately, by defeating the "logical" conventions — in other words, fictions — of newspaper writing and presentation, Drucker destabilizes the comfort of headlines, articles, and cross-references. Actively deciding how to read the text — left to right, top to bottom, bigger to smaller, bolder to

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[16] John Ashbery, *Three Poems* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), p. 41.

QUIS
MUDAR   TUDO
MUDEI   TUDO
AGORAPÓSTUDO
EXTUDO
MUDO

lighter—the reader becomes aware of the materiality of this and the other (sup-
posedly factual and stable) texts it resembles.

Drucker's work goes well past the innovations of 1950s and 1960s concrete po-
etry, some of which (say, the canonical texts by Pignatari and Xisto treated here)
are designed to arrive in a kind of international lingua franca; Drucker's texts, by
contrast, are practically untranslatable. This character of her work has much to do
with how she participates in what Roman Jakobson called the *poetic function*. A text
such as *Against Fiction* projects the "paradigmatic" dimension of language onto the
"syntagmatic" not only in view of meaning—where poetry's choices typically call
attention to their figuration and materiality, "deepen[ing] the fundamental di-
chotomy of signs and objects"—but in terms of format.[17] Her play with paradigms
and alternatives, that is, extends to elements that do not concern most poets, and
assures us that this is how the book should look, feel, exist. All the choices seem
paradigmatic ones; everything matters. [Kevin Young]

37. Augusto de Campos, *Expoemas*, São Paulo: Entretempo, 1985 [XZ 287 PF],
    separate sheets.

As Charles Perrone observes in his article ("The Imperative of Invention: Brazilian
Concrete Poetry and Intersemiotic Creation") in this issue of the *Bulletin*, "the
timely poem 'pós-tudo' (1984) is a 'post-everything' questioning of post-modern-
ism as fashion and an ambiguous affirmation (*mudo* = 'mute' / 'I change') of silence
(implying all has been said) and mutability (implying the subject's representation of
the principle of perpetual change)."

17 Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," *Style in*   Press, 1960), p. 356.
   Language, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Cambridge: MIT

38. ———. "Donne em Dobro," *O Anticrítico*, São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1986 [PQ9698.13.A554.A8.1986], pp. 74–75.

The Brazilian concrete poet reads John Donne's lyric "The Expiration" with "new eyes." The poem, Campos observes, is filled with doublings—of words, sounds, and letters—and produces a kind of "feedback" in which what we read is interfered with, but strangely enhanced by, what has come before. Campos's critical poem begins as follows:

> I always thought of Donne
> as a great conceptist poet
> capable to expanding a metaphorical proposition
> to the maximum
> in a complicated game of conceptual prisms.
> The poet of logopoeia [semantic play]
> above all.
> Only recently
> chance
> made me look with new eyes
> at the poem "the expiration"
> and see there a more secret Donne,
> propitious to the semiotic incitations of cryptologopoeia.

The opening shows Campos's reading of a newly material Donne realized on the page. [Sue Walters]

39. Susan Howe, *A Bibliography of the King's Book or Eikon Basilike*, Providence: Paradigm Press, 1989, pp. [4–5].

Howe situates her work within a set of historical and cultural intertexts that produce and are produced by the poems and essays she writes. In *Bibliography*, she takes a controversy about a text as her foundation. Her introduction describes the dispute over the authorship of a text supposedly written by Charles I. The book was later claimed by an Anglican bishop as his own forgery, and it has never been established who is the author. Howe takes the original, controversial text along with various published opinions on its origin, and combines fragments of them with her own writing to form a new, cacophonous whole. The two consecutive pages displayed in the exhibition are identical, though the head of the verso page appears alongside the foot of the recto.

In her essay entitled "Encloser," Howe describes her own writing as "haunted" by external texts:

> I think of a poet as being a receptor of many voices. A mixture of cultures and voices. But each poet is one voice—a singularity. . . . I love words. I hope they are allowed to suggest all meanings possible. I hope that language will always be an undiscovered country. All poetry that sets words free is political. . . . words will always escape into their own mystery. At least I hope they will.[18] [Eve Herzog]

[18] Susan Howe, "Encloser," *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*, ed. Charles Bernstein (New York: Roof Books, 1990), pp. 193, 195.

40. Jackson Mac Low, Sonnet 4, *French Sonnets*, Milwaukee: Membrane Press, 1989, p. [4].

41. Stephen Ratcliffe, "blunt," *[where late the sweet]* BIRDS SANG, Oakland: O Books, 1989, p. [10].

Before and after Shakespeare, sonnets have often fascinated poets who privilege materiality, perhaps because the form usually epitomizes an opposite — i.e., first-person, confessional — approach to lyric poetry, perhaps because the sonnet was once a highly material construct that somehow came to seem natural and inevitable. These two volumes both honor and deform Shakespeare's originals.

Mac Low's *French Sonnets* is a collection generated, like most of the poet's work, by aleatory procedures. Each word in Shakespeare's original sonnet is replaced with another found in an arbitrary copy of *Heath's French–English Dictionary*, hence the name *French Sonnets*. But the new poems are not word-by-word translations into French. After Mac Low looked up each word in the English half of the dictionary, he replaced it with the English word at the top of the same column, a word of the same first letter as the original. When Mac Low tired of using the same headword (*thanksgiver*) to stand in for *the* and *thus*, he added another random operation to the system: he did not pick the headword at the top of that column, but pointed blindly at another column in the same initialled section and used its headword. After he had selected all the words, he changed their cases and conjugations to fit those in the original. Mac Low's Sonnet 4 is an adaptation of Shakespeare's Sonnet 19.

Ratcliffe, a scholar of Renaissance poetry as well as an experimental poet, also manipulates Shakespeare's *Sonnets* to produce his own collection. Starting with the received, complete texts, he deletes words and leaves white spaces as markers for them; all fourteen lines are retained, but their scattered appearance on the page suggests an openness of interpretation, which the blockish original sonnets ostensibly do not. [Michele Forman]

42. Johanna Drucker, *The Word Made Flesh*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Druckwerk, 1989 [Typ 970.89.3392F], p. [8].

43. ———. *History of ᵗʰᵉ/ₘᵧ Wor(l)d*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Druckwerk, 1990 [courtesy of the Bow and Arrow Press], p. [1].

As color — especially red — enters Drucker's later work, she joins a tradition of the polyglot page associated with multilingual Bibles such as the sixteenth-century Complutensian. Such volumes prefigure Drucker's concern with integrating several different weights and textures of type — for instance, the humanist types of Latin, the black-letter of Chaldean, scriptlike Arabic, and finally the multitudinous glosses. This emphasis is best seen perhaps in *The Word Made Flesh*, where each letter of the title becomes an eponym that takes up most of the page and both interrupts and initiates the surrounding, smaller texts in black and red. Like her collaborative *Sample Dialog* (with Emily McVarish), Drucker's *Word* was "made flesh" in the Bow and Arrow Press of Adams House. A so-called "language" poet, Drucker finds her constraints among not only the available language, but literally the available types — while in *The Word Made Flesh* "the type is something of everything linear" in the press, *Dialog* (in an edition of ten) uses "the typical [pun intended?] and ornamental resources of the Bow & Arrow Press . . . in strict accordance with the daily weather forecasts that marked the passage of mid-July, 1989."

Drucker recognizes, and even reinscribes, the random and often restrictive conditions under which texts and books are made.

The latest "Druckwerk" (as she styles it) here is *History of* ^the^/~my~ *Wor(l)d*, a multivalent text that can be seen as an illustrated version of *The Word Made Flesh*. Apart from the ongoing tension between black and red text (as in the polyglots and Hrabanus Maurus) and between size and shape (as in the Dadaists), the illustrations vie for the reader's attention. While most polyglots deal with issues of texture and tension between languages, Drucker looks within language in an intraglot, quite literally, of "sorts" — another name for the individual pieces of type she uses to fashion and deconstruct her own texts. [Kevin Young]