‘But begun for others to end’: 
the ends of incompletion

To make something, it might be assumed, is to aim to produce a finished product. This assumption dominates many critical readings of spectator experiences in the early modern period. Stephen Greenblatt’s seminal analysis of Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, for example, turns in part on the complicity of the audience in the production of the image of the king:

> The audience’s tension, then, enhances its attention; prodded by constant reminders of a gap between real and ideal, the spectators are induced to make up the difference, to invest in the illusion of magnificence, to be dazzled by their own imaginary identification with the conqueror.¹

That spectators are ‘induced to make up the difference’ in what they see onstage is central to my understanding of viewers of plays and visual representations as interactive figures. But what would ‘making up the difference’ mean for those spectators? The place of the ‘finished product’ in the early modern imagination is called into question by my suggestion that images in this period are envisaged as matter ‘under construction’ at the hands of spectators. To dislodge early modern concepts of finish and completion is to suggest that the constant reproduction of incompletions may be a condition of cultural production in this period. This much is often suggested in early modern studies. Writing on *The Winter’s Tale*, for example, Knapp concludes that ‘the openness attributed to the Shakespearean text may well be a defining feature of the aesthetic object’.² Similarly, in her work on English visual culture in this period, Christy Anderson suggests that elite English viewers delighted in a varied visual regime at odds with the rigid regulation imposed on the eye by modes of representation such as linear perspective.³ As Sir Henry Wotton writes in *The Elements of Architecture* (1624), the ‘Eye’ is a ‘raunging, Imperious … usurping Sence’ which ‘can indure no narrow circumscription: but must be fedde, both with extent and varietie’.⁴ The ‘openness’ of *The Winter’s Tale*, and the status of *Henry V* as a play under construction at the hands of spectators could therefore be understood as reflective of early modern English enthusiasm for aesthetic irregularity in addition to an incompleteness understood as inherent in aesthetic composition.
Accepting this position, however, the question remains as to what exactly it is that spectators aim to ‘make’ when they are confronted by supposedly unfinished spectacle. This question becomes even more urgent if we accept incompleteness as a functional part of cultural production in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. Finally, we should be forced to address this question because it is a subject with which early modern English writers are themselves preoccupied. For example, John Lyly begins his second prose work, *Euphues and His England* (first published 1580), with a dedicatory letter to Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, in which he self-depreciatingly compares the making of Euphues to the production of an incomplete image:

For he that vieweth Euphues will say that he is drawn but to the waist, that he peepeth as it were behind some screen, that his feet are yet in the water; which maketh me present your Lordship with the mangled body of Hector as it appeared to Andromache, and with half a face as the painter did him that had but one eye, for I am compelled to draw a hose on before I can finish the leg, and instead of a foot to set down a shoe. (p. 159)

Lyly suggests that *Euphues and His England* is a botched, rushed and consequently insubstantial job, equivalent to a half-finished drawing, or a picture which shows only a part of its subject in order to cover up faults, errors and a lack of content. The prefatory context invites us to read these allusions to unfinished images of semi-concealed subjects as examples of the sort of polite deference that also informs the appeals to the audience in the Prologue of *Henry V*, and Trevilian’s deference to ‘better stored’ readers in his *Great Book*. Yet immediately prior to this display of the text’s faults, Lyly refers to examples of classical painters including Apelles, Nichomachus and Timomachus, who ‘broke off’ the making of images ‘scarce half-coloured’ due to ‘fear’ and being ‘threatened’ (p. 159). Lyly claims that his depiction of Euphues follows the pattern of these interrupted acts of making, that he is ‘enforced with the old painters’ to ‘colour’ his picture ‘but to the middle’ (p. 159). Leah Scragg notes that there is no precedent for Lyly’s claims that the ‘old painters’ were prevented by fear from completing their works. It therefore seems that Lyly associates his prose work with representations which are left incomplete due to pressures from an unidentified source of authority.

The theme of ‘enforced’ incompletion is repeated later in the prose work. In 1563, the Elizabethan government drafted a proclamation suggesting measures for the regulation of the production of portraits of the queen. The plan was for one image of Elizabeth I to be made by ‘some special commission painter’, as a stock ‘example’ to be ‘followed’ in all other depictions of the queen. Euphues alludes to these moves to control the pictorial representation of the monarch when he introduces his own attempt to verbally picture Elizabeth:
though it be not requisite that any should paint their Prince in England that cannot sufficiently perfect her ... I will set down this Elizabeth as near as I can; and it may be that as the Venus of Apelles not finished, the Tyndarides of Nicomachus not ended, the Medea of Timomachus not perfected, the table of Parrhasius not coloured brought greater desire to them to consummate them and to others to see them, so the Elizabeth of Euphues, being but shadowed for others to varnish, but begun for others to end, but drawn with a black coal for others to blaze with a bright colour, may work either a desire in Euphues hereafter if he live to end it, or a mind in those that are better able to amend it, or in all (if none can work it) a will to wish it. (p. 333)

The relationship between the portrayal of Elizabeth and the reader/viewer described here parallels the interactive relationship between audience and performance described by Greenblatt, as Euphues’s image of Elizabeth is ‘begun for others to end’, stimulating the audience to ‘make up the difference’ in desiring to see the ‘end’ of the work. At the same time, Euphues’s announcement of the production of a work which may or may not be finished cancels any certainty of arrival at a moment of completion, a concept idealised here as a state for which both image-maker and spectators may ‘wish’, but perhaps not witness. The suggestion that Euphues’s endpoint in the production of the unfinished portrait may be followed by future endings in the course of the depiction of the queen evokes a Derridean understanding of endings as a part of an unending network of signification.

It might seem sufficient, at this point, to accept that the constant deferral of completion implicit in the description of Euphues’s image of Elizabeth constituted a ‘finished’ state in early modern thought. This view is invited by the focus on fragmentation which has long dominated early modern research in a range of areas, particularly in studies of the body and the materiality of early modern texts. Critical emphasis on fracture has been especially encouraged by post-structuralist theory, and my discussion in the previous chapter of the referential fracture implicit in mimesis might be taken as an example of the critical influence of a postmodern aesthetics of ‘disunity’. The discursive fracture noted by post-structuralists complements the view of early modern literary and playing culture as piecemeal that is articulated most usefully in Tiffany Stern’s work on the patchiness of early modern rehearsal and performance practices and texts. In emphasising playwrights’ lack of a sense of a play as a ‘whole’, Stern’s contributions offer a rare insight into the implications of fragmentation for our understanding of cultural production. Although critical emphasis on dispersal and fracture calls concepts of wholeness into question, the place of such concepts in critical discourse on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature remains curiously unaddressed. Cynthia Marshall, for example, implies the pre-existence of a concept of psychic wholeness in the suggestion that ‘a Renaissance literature of self-shattering’ offers readers and spectators ‘an experience of psychic fracture’. 
Such an analysis maintains an attachment to concepts of unity and finish, even as these are destabilised by engagement with discourses of fragmentation. In an effort to detach from unexplored attachments to aesthetic concepts that held a questionable place in early modern culture, this chapter aims to historicise late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century concepts of completion and incomple- tion. I am especially interested in further opening up early modern concepts of divine, non-referential perfection as this relates to material, earthly incompleteness. To begin this exploration, I will attempt to sketch an outline of the ambiguous place of these concepts in the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century imagination.

A ‘compleat discourse’?

In the early part of the seventeenth century, a proliferation of conduct manuals and texts were published with titles including the adjective ‘complete’. For example, Henry Peacham’s *The Compleat Gentleman* (1622), Sir John Doddridge’s *A Compleat Parson* (1630), William Noy’s *The Compleat Lawyer* (1651), Samuel Hartlib’s *The Compleat Husband-man* (1659) and Stephen Blake’s *The Compleat Gardeners Practice* (1664). These texts present assembled information and ‘absolute’ learning on their various subjects. In this sense, these uses of ‘compleat’ reflect the earliest meaning of this adjective noted in the *OED*, that is ‘having all its parts or members, comprising the full amount; embracing all the requisite item, details, topics; entire, full’. At the same time, ‘compleat’ in these titles also indicates the perfection in conduct which readers may achieve. Thomas De Grey’s *The Compleat Horseman and Expert Ferrier* (1639), for example, aims to instruct the reader so that he may ‘be known to be exquisite in Horsemanship’, and consequently ‘have more eyes upon him as he passeth along, than are commonly cast upon a Comet or the Sun eclipsed’. The popularity of ‘compleat’ as a title-word for these treatises of self-improvement emphasises an early modern link between concepts of completion and the attainment of idealised levels of ability in praxis. From the vantage point of dictionary record, then, the ‘complete’ of *The Compleat Horseman* aligns adjectival allusion to a highly practised ‘end’ with on-going practice.

This is not to suggest that the temporal senses of ‘finish’ and ‘completion’ were unknown in this period. The *OED* suggests that ‘complete’ had been used in a temporal sense since the fourteenth century. The phrase ‘finished’, meanwhile, had been used to describe an action as ‘completed’ since the sixteenth century, while the first known use of ‘unfinished’ occurs in the 1553 accounts of the Office of the Revels. Although the state of finish or completion as an endpoint was envisaged during the sixteenth century, however, the *OED* suggests that terminology denoting the state of reaching the fullness of that endpoint does not come into use until the seventeenth century. This development
participates in what appears to be a seventeenth-century expansion in the discourse of completion. According to the OED, the first usage of ‘completeness’, meaning ‘the state or quality of being complete’, occurs in John Earle’s Micro-cosmographie. or, a pice of the worlde discovered, in essayes and characters (1628), in a discussion of ‘the Worlds wise man’, for whom ‘two or three Countries make up to this compleatnesse’. Micro-cosmographie draws attention to a sense of ‘the worlde’ as a whole, assembled from pieces, and representable in a text. The difficulty of materialising this sense of wholeness in text form, however, is highlighted in a preface by Edward Blount, which exposes the origins of Micro-cosmographie in ‘loose sheets’ and ‘sundry dispersed Transcripts, some very imperfect’. Recalling the apologetic tones of Euphues’s account of his image of Elizabeth, Blount admits that there may be ‘faults' in Micro-cosmographie, since Earle, aware that ‘imperfect’ writings had gone to the printers, ‘was willingly unwilling to let them passe as now they appeare to the World’. Early allusions to completeness as a ‘state … of being’ in the terms of the OED, then, coincide with a sense of cultural production as marked by material faultiness and imperfection. In such a context, the possibility of attaining completeness as a state of material finish seems unstable. Indeed, ‘finish’ does not come into use as a noun until the eighteenth century. Early modern commentators, then, gesture adjectivally towards finish, but this term is associated ambiguously with a materially attainable state even in the 1620s.

Around the mid-to-late seventeenth century, concepts of completion begin to be linked with more conviction to notions of attainable finish. The OED suggests that the first-known published usage of ‘completion’, meaning ‘the act of completing or making complete; the condition of being completed or perfected’, occurs in a speech given by Oliver Cromwell on 21 April 1657, in which Cromwell refers to the ‘completion of the business’ of his speech. Given the slippage between what Cromwell may have said in his speeches and what he is reported to have said, this source does not offer a very stable date for the emergence of this sense of ‘completion’. It does not seem a coincidence, however, that a cluster of terms relating to completeness are claimed in the OED to come into use during the 1640s, 1650s and 1660s. For example, the now obsolete noun ‘completure’ is used in an account of the ‘high compleature of all devout expressions’ in a 1642 collection of the speeches of Sir Edward Dering. The OED refers to Milton’s works as a key source of examples for this changing discourse on completeness. The 1667 first edition of Paradise Lost, for example, illustrates the earliest known deployment of ‘complete’ as a verb in the sense ‘to make perfect’. Correspondingly, Milton is also credited with the first usage of ‘incompleatness’ in the second edition of his The Doctrine and Discipline of divorce (1644). This mid-seventeenth-century expansion in the language of completeness suggests a growing sense of this state as an attainable condition that may be accounted for and described. On the basis of this brief overview, it seems that
the possibility of the attainment of states of completeness or incompleteness was fully articulated during the earlier part of the seventeenth century. The ‘compleat’ discourse of this earlier period describes the assemblage of a whole, but does not name the state or action of totalising finish and its corresponding absence.

The expanding discourse of completeness in this period suggests a growing interest in what it means to enter into a process of production with an anticipated endpoint. The growing nature of that interest, and earlier definitions’ emphasis on piecemeal assemblage, indicate that we cannot take for granted the place of material finish in the early modern imagination. In other words, when the prologue to Henry V invites playgoers to ‘make up the difference’, this request may be made partly in recognition that that difference is unknown and unattainable. In the previous chapter, I suggested that Shakespeare depicted Hermione’s statue as ‘under construction’ as part of the evocation of divine ‘wholeness’ and perfection. This perfect, creative wholeness was directly contrasted with earthly, referential incompleteness. As we have seen, however, Shakespeare was writing in a time before a fully developed notion of ‘incompleteness’ contrasted with an attainable state of ‘completeness’. In the next section, I explore divine hierarchies of ‘making’ as the cause of what emerges as an early modern investment in incompleteness (as distinct from incompleteness).

**God the creator**

In early modern England, a central problem posed by the act of image-making is how to explain the relationship between earthly acts of cultural production and divine creativity. Although the Reformation in England is famed for its supposed rejection of visual experience, it is notable that the relationship between mortality and divinity is often expressed in aesthetic terms. Man was made in God’s image, and the divinity of that creation was thought to be especially visible in facial beauty. Aesthetic bodily perfection was associated with divine unity and harmony, but as Naomi Baker points out, within the contradictions of early modern aesthetic discourse ‘even the misshapen could be seen as an expression of divine creativity’. As we have seen, God’s creativity was associated with a non-mimetic, pre-linguistic ‘perfection’ in which there is a coincidence between sign and signified. God’s creative activities, however, were accounted for in the language of material cultural production, as in Sidney’s claim that through his literary work a poet gives ‘right honour to the heavenly Maker of that maker, who … made man to His own likeness’ (p. 86, lines 2–3). Sidney’s playful alignment of God as ‘Maker’ in such close juxtaposition with a reference to the poet as ‘maker’ suggests this writer’s interest in God and poets as comparable practitioners. Sidney’s argument is also, of course, that it is inherent to post-lapsarianism to want to reach beyond mortal limitations.
imposed by ‘our infected will’ and towards divine ‘perfection’ (p. 86, lines 7–8). Sidney’s attempts to legitimise post-lapsarian ‘will’ to transgress mortal limits indicates an underlying concern with the propriety of the ‘figuring forth’ of a ‘speaking picture’ (p. 86, lines 8–19). That concern is reflected repeatedly in early modern discourses on image-making, which call attention to the unmatchable proficiency of divine creation. For example, writers who attack the cosmetic alteration of visual appearances are unsurprisingly preoccupied with notions of God as image-maker.27 The author ‘Miso-Spilus’ attacks ‘black-spotted faces’, suggesting that women who paint on such spots erroneously prefer ‘their own artificial Craft and Invention before the Syncere and uncorrupt Workmanship of their Creator’.28 Discussing the adornment of the body in The Droomme of Doomes Day (1576), meanwhile, George Gascoigne complains that in the making of ‘outward appearance’:

An artyficiall shew is layed on, and a naturall face and favour is hyd and taken awaye. As though the arte of man created, were above the excellent works of God the creator. Not so, not so, O men Consider you, (sayeth the Lord) the lillyes of the fyeld how they growe. They do neyther labor nor spynne. But I say unto you: that Salomon in all his glory was not clothed lyke unto one of them. God forbid that a counterfeit colour shoulde be to be compared unto a naturall collor. For whylest the face is painted with a counterfeit collour the skine is marred w[ith] … filthiness.29

God is the only creator, and ‘artyficiall’ activities on earth cannot and should not attempt to compete. Indeed, artificial makings ‘mar’ and distract us from the appreciation of God’s creation, since, as Calvin argued, ‘invisible’ God is visible to man in ‘the workmaneship of the whole world, wherein the glory of God doth shine unto us’.30 The discursive importance of divine creativity remains relatively under-explored in early modern studies. Rayna Kalas has considered the discursive relationship between earthly and divine acts of making, noting that in the early modern period the term ‘frame’ can refer to both the “‘handie work of God” in creating the world, or, alternately, the imagined craftsmanship of “the divels workshop”’.31 The connection between ‘frame’ and ‘studied obedience to God’, Kalas observes, means that deployments of this term with reference to ‘willful disobedience’ have ‘a strong rhetorical effect of dissonance’.32 Natasha Korda, meanwhile, has noted that early modern treatises on accountancy insisted ‘on perfection, while recognizing that absolute exactitude belonged only to the divine, as “there is no persone so perfight but that he shall sometyme misse, and entre some thyng wrong”’.33 Writing on Golding’s translation of Ovid’s Metamorphoses, Susan Wiseman observes that ‘the Christian creation story meant that claims to later transformations were highly controversial and brought into play the question of how to interpret “transformation” in a world
whose shapes were fixed by God and, in most theories, changed only by him’.34 Catherine Belsey, finally, discusses the function of the creation myth in the early modern formation of the ideology of the family.35 For the most part, however, the far-reaching implications of early modern belief in God as creator remain underexplored.

This neglect is significant, because slippages in the distinction between man and God shape the post-Reformation social and religious turbulence in which theatre is implicated. In the divinely ordained hierarchy of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England, the perfection of God is transferred to the head of state. In literary and visual depictions of Elizabeth as ‘Gloriana’, and in the glorifying spectacle of the Stuart court masques, cultural products throughout the period sought to deify the monarchy.36 This deification was particularly reinforced by the impact of the Reformation on visual culture, as in churches the spaces previously occupied by religious images were replaced by symbols of Elizabethan and Stuart rule.37 Where altarpieces in the celebration of Catholic mass had been used to strengthen the bond between celebrants and Christ’s sacrifice, symbols of monarchical rule were deployed to strengthen the loyalty of English subjects. The replacement of religious images with royal visual representations is reflected in Haydocke’s 1598 translation of Lomazzo, in which ‘any discussion of images of God and the saints’ was ‘not dropped but … simply transferred to a defense of the image of the ruler and the seals of the commonwealth’.38 Given the ‘privileged visibility’ of power in this period, the visual representation of the monarch is a highly regulated area, subject to extensive state ‘scrutiny’.39 In such a context the state theoretically dictates what constitutes the deific ‘perfection’ of the monarch, whilst also defining the aesthetic appearance of a ‘complete’ visual representation of this supposed perfection. The completion of images is thus not within the remit of subjects. Under state regulation, theatre companies could never embark on the production of a play with a sense that they would define the moment at which that production was ready for performance.40 A context of state surveillance thus demands that those engaged in the making of plays and visual representations continually produce unfinished material.

This is not to suggest, however, that in such a context monarchs have an unproblematic control over acts of representation. Given their supposed divine ordination, it is imperative that kings and queens are not seen to be engaged in processes of artificial construction which compromise their divinity. Significantly, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century critiques of kingship often exploit allusions to processes of material and visual construction, as is exemplified by the anonymous, unfinished play Thomas of Woodstock (c. 1591–95). This play presents Richard II as a vain, frivolous monarch, who favours the advice of low-born councillors over that of his noble relations, particularly his uncle, the Lord Protector, Thomas of Woodstock. Richard desires to ‘exceed’ all kings in
‘bounty state and royalty’, plans to ‘ride through London only to be gazed at’, and hopes also to ‘every day … feast ten thousand men’. This self-indulgence is contrasted with the concern of the Queen and Richard’s noble elders that the king ‘starvest’ his ‘wretched subjects’ to pay for his excesses (2.3.103). Complaints about Richard’s behaviour, however, do not focus on descriptions of the impoverishment that he causes. Sir Thomas Cheney, for example, laments:

They sit in council and devise strange fashions,
And suit themselves in wild and antic habits
Such as this kingdom never yet beheld:
French hose, Italian cloaks and Spanish hats,
Polonian shoes with peaks a handful long,
Tied to their knees with chains of pearl and gold.
Their plumèd tops fly waving in the air
A cubit high above their wanton heads.
Tresilian with King Richard likewise sits,
Devising taxes and strange shifts for money
To build again the hall at Westminster
To feast and revel in. (2.3.88–99)

Cheney’s anxieties about Richard’s rule are expressed here in revulsion at the king’s enthusiasm for the construction of a hall to feast in’ (2.3.102), and his pre-occupation with designing flamboyant, and notably foreign, outfits. Richard’s enthusiasm for visual and material processes of construction is thus treated as symptomatic of his weak kingship.

The conflict between the imperfection attendant on post-lapsarian mortality and the supposedly non-artificial perfection associated with kingship seriously destabilises early modern acts of cultural production. Lyly, for example, explores the challenges faced by the court visual artist in the dedicatory letter to Lord Delaware with which Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit opens:

Alexander, having a scar in his cheek held his finger upon it that Apelles might not paint it. Apelles painted him with his finger cleaving to his face. ‘Why,’ quoth Alexander, ‘I laid my finger on my scar because I would not have thee see it.’ ‘Yea,’ said Apelles, ‘and I drew it there because none else should perceive it, for if thy finger had been away either thy scar would have been seen or my art misconceived.’ Whereby I gather that in all perfect works as well the fault as the face is to be shown.42

Alexander is depicted constructing an image of bodily and moral perfection, given that physical appearance could be taken as an indicator of moral character in the early modern period.43 Apelles’s claim that in an image which is not to be ‘misliked’ by authority, ‘imperfections’ must not be left out, suggests that a state-authorised representation will always be in some respect incomplete.
Yet Apelles also indicates that a mimetic image of an authority figure must depict the process by which perspectives damaging to that authority figure are concealed. This anecdote exposes the irresolvable conflict between the image-maker’s desire to produce an aesthetically ‘perfect work’, their lack of authority to do so, and the need for that authority figure to construct what will appear as a non-artificial, ‘perfect’ appearance.

The impasse produced by the clash between Apelles’s and Alexander’s attempts at image-making is the condition which generates the repeatedly ‘unfinished’ status of literary and visual representations in this period. The gaps in the presentation of the king in *Henry V*, which, according to Greenblatt, prompt the audience to ‘make up the difference’ in the representation that they view, emerge from this context of a collision between different ends and aims of making. The avoidance of ‘finish’ enables the evocation of contrasting meanings, and hence a fluctuation between subversion and conformity within a cultural product. Building on this observation, the next part of this chapter explores the extent to which figures of incompletion are adopted by early modern writers in order to negotiate relationships between representations, audiences and authority.

‘A frame without a face’: political blank canvases

In *Euphues and His England*, Euphues, discussing his depiction of Elizabeth, conceptualises the incompletion produced by the visual artist subject to state authority as an empty ‘table’:

> When Alexander had commanded that none should paint him but Apelles, none carve him but Lysippus, none engrave him but Pyrgoteles, Parrhasius framed a table squared every way two hundred foot, which in the borders he trimmed with fresh colours and limned with fine gold, leaving all the other room without knot or line. Which table he presented to Alexander, who, no less marvelling at the bigness than at the bareness, demanded to what end he gave him a frame without a face, being so naked, and without fashion, being so great. Parrhasius answered him, ‘Let it be lawful for Parrhasius, O Alexander, to show a table wherein he would paint Alexander if it were not unlawful, and for others to square timber though Lysippus carve it, and for all to cast brass though Pyrgoteles engrave it.’ (p. 332–3)

According to Kalas, the term ‘frame’ did not start to take on the modern sense of ‘the quadrilateral that surrounds a work of art’ until around 1600 as a ‘late estimate’. The ‘frame’ presented to Alexander in Euphues’s anecdote is therefore ‘not the ornamental quadrilateral of a modern frame, but a prepared wooden panel’, onto which paint would be applied to compose the portrait. Parrhasius thus offers the emperor an early modern equivalent to a blank canvas: the bare base of a pictorial representation under construction. In the anecdote discussed above, Apelles’s actions reflect the challenges faced by the court visual artist; here,
Parrhasius’s actions expose the difficulties encountered by those who seek to represent authority without having the authorisation to do so. Parrhasius deferentially obeys the commandment not to depict Alexander, but the painter works with the limitations imposed on his professional life, repackaging the ‘bareness’ that is left to him as an accurate representation of those limitations. Emptiness, blankness, ‘all the other room without knot or line’, becomes an expression of the relationship between authority and the unauthorised image-maker. This anecdote could read as a cynical condemnation of this relationship, or as an affirmation of the propriety of artistic deference to a monarch. At the same time, however, the story of Parrhasius projects the empowerment of the disempowered visual artist through the deployment of a blank, naked, base for representation which placates as it critiques relationships between representation and absolute rule.

Parrhasius’s exploitation of the empty frame intersects with a broader early modern tendency to use depictions of blankness and nakedness in the discussion of sensitive political themes. Earlier in Euphues and His England, the eponymous Greek character describes a popular example of the deployment of bareness in such a context. Describing English apparel, Euphues explains:

There is nothing in England more constant than the inconstancy of attire. Now using the French fashion, now the Spanish, then the Morisco gowns, the one thing, then another-insomuch that in drawing of an Englishman the painter setteth him down naked, having in the one hand a pair of shears, in the other a piece of cloth, who having cut his collar after the French guise is ready to make his sleeve after the Barbarian manner. (pp. 324–5)

This account of the inconstancy of English attire alludes to one of the most frequently discussed emblems of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, which first appears in Andrew Boorde’s The fyrst boke of the introduction of knowledge, written in 1542 and published in c.1555 (figure 18).

In this work Boorde describes a range of regions, the ‘natural disposicion’ of the inhabitants, and ‘theyr money and … theyr speche’. The first chapter is devoted to England and the ‘Englishman’, and opens with a woodcut depicting a bearded man walking in a rural landscape, naked but for a loincloth and a hat decorated with a feather. The man wields a large pair of shears, and carries fabric, folded over his right arm. The woodcut is accompanied by verse explaining the Englishman’s situation from his viewpoint:

I am an English man, and naked I stand here
Musyng in my mynde, what rayment I shal were
For now I wyll were thys and now I wyll were that
Now I wyll were I cannot tell what
All new fashyons, be plesaunt to me. (sig. A3v)

Boorde’s depiction of an Englishman obsessed with different styles of clothing intersects with anxieties about dress and the instability of national identity
widespread in early modern Europe. Since ‘foreign cloth’ was seen as ‘sinister in its power to undermine England’s virtue’, critical readings of this woodcut have emphasised that the shears wielded by the naked man are suggestive of an ability to fashion individual identity which would have been unsettling for an early modern audience. Keir Elam, for example, describes the scissors wielded by Boorde’s Englishman as ‘threatening’. Roze Hentschell, similarly, comments on the extent to which certain authors, including Thomas Dekker, were alarmed by ‘the agency’ of the naked Englishman. Dekker refers to Boorde’s emblem in a ferocious attack on the clothing choices of his male contemporaries in the plague-pamphlet, *The Seven deadly Sinnes of London*:

Wittie was that Painter therefore, that when hee had limned one of every Nation in [their] proper attyres, and beeing at his wittes endes howe to drawe an Englishman: At the last (to give him a quip for his follie in apparell) drewe him starke naked,
with Sheeres in his hand, and cloth on his arme, because none could cut out his fashions but himselfe. For an English-mans suite is like a traitors bodie that hath beene hanged, drawne, and quartered, and is set up in severall places: his Codpeece is in Denmarke, the collor of his Duble and the belly in France: the wing and narrow sleeve in Italy: the short waste hangs over a Dutch Botchers stall in Utrich: his huge stoppes speakes Spanish: Polonia gives him the Bootes: the blocke for his head alters faster then the Feltmaker can fitte him, and thereupon we are called in scorne Blockheads.51

Dekker, as Hentschell highlights, ‘points out that only the Englishman “himselfe” has the ability “to cut out his fashions”’.52 In brandishing the tools and material to construct a new, not necessarily English outfit, the man has subversive control of the shaping of his own visual and national identity.53 In this reading, the nakedness of the man is representative of a vulnerability which emphasises the instability of national identity, and the economic fragility incurred by the consumption of foreign fashions.54

Boorde’s naked Englishman reflects anxieties about the stability of national identity, but also intersects with celebratory nationalistic rhetoric. Elam states that Boorde’s woodcut associates the Englishman with a ‘plainness in dress and in behaviour’ and Puritan ‘plain truthfulness’ by ‘negative inference’.55 In my view, Boorde’s handling of the man’s half-dressed state appeals directly to nationalistic interests. The woodcut draws on early modern concepts of masculinity; the beard sported by the naked figure, for example, reaffirms his manliness.56 Assuming that the man in the image is a gentleman and not aristocratic, furthermore, it can be said that the choice not to depict him in sumptuous attire protects his masculinity, since ‘social emulation of aristocratic splendour created ... effeminacy in upstart men’.57 The appeal of the naked body as a symbol of strength in this context is also indicated by the fact that when using the template of Boorde’s image to describe French habits of dress, Robert Dallington depicts ‘the Frenchman’ holding sheers, but does not suggest that he is naked. Dallington states:

Every two yere the fashion changeth. And hereof it commeth, that when ye see all other Nations paynted in the proper habit of their Countrey, the French man is always pictured with a paire of sheeres in his hand, to signify, that he hath no peculiar habit of his own, nor contenteth himselfe long with the habit of any other, but according to his cappriccious humour, deviseth daily new fashions.58

Nakedness, it seems, provides a bold statement of moral strength which particularly flatters the interests of nationalistic self-representation.

The popularity of the deployment of the unadorned body for the discussion of national visual identity is indicated by the extent to which early modern authors who discuss the image are preoccupied with Boorde’s choice of this mode of representation. A reference to Boorde’s emblem in William Harrison’s
‘An Historicall description of the Islande of Britayne’, for example, emphasises Boorde’s struggle to convey in a single image the fluctuating attire of English men:

An Englishman indeavouring sometime to write of our attire, made sundry plat - formes for his purpose, supposing by some of them to find out one stedfast ground whereon to builde the summe of his discourse. But in the ende (like an oratour, long without exercise) when he saw what a difficult piece of worke he had taken in hande, he gave over his travelle, and onelye drue the picture of a naked man, unto whome he gave a paire of sheares in the one hand, a peece of cloth in the other, to the end he should shape his apparrell after such fashion as himselfe liked, sith he could find no kind of garment that coulde please him anie whyle togyther, and this he called an Englishman. Certes thys writer (otherwise being a lewde and ungra - cious priest) showed himselfe herein not to be voyde of judgement.59

Harrison notably devotes some time here to describing the process of the making of the image as undertaken by Boorde. Boorde is here a ‘writer’, who uses images, referred to as ‘platformes’, to formulate his ideas (pp. 171–2).60 It is important for my argument that Harrison’s commendation of Boorde’s ‘judgement’ and skill in visual representation is echoed across the many sixteenth- and seventeenth-century accounts of this image, most of which refer to Boorde as a painter. Dekker sympathises with the ‘wittie’ painter of the image, driven to his ‘wittes endes’ by English fickleness in dress (p. 31). Karel Van Mander’s account of the Flemish visual artist Lucas De Heere’s attempt to depict English dress in a gallery of costumes in 1570 mirrors descriptions of Boorde’s emblem.61 The costume gallery has not survived, but there is an image extremely similar to Boorde’s woodcut in a series of depictions of costume by De Heere, in a manuscript held by Ghent University Library, dated to 1550.62 Van Mander reports that De Heere depicted the Englishman naked, holding shears and mate - rial, because the painter ‘did not know what appearance or kind of clothing he should give him because they varied so much from day to day’.63

While the Englishman’s possession of shears and fabric is, for an early modern audience, an unsettling sign of individualistic agency, the story of the making of the image is repeatedly presented as a triumph of visual representa - tion achieved by an exasperated painter working in impossible circumstances. Boorde’s emphasis on the practicalities of making in this example thus acts as a mode of evasive defence against the threats perceived to be posed by the potential results of the Englishman’s acts of visual construction. The ‘security’ of the bareness of Boorde’s Englishman, then, is bolstered by the shears that he wields, and by the incomplete, unconstructed state of his appearance. This suggestion is strongly supported by the fact that in the dialogue which accompanies the woodcut, ‘the Auctor’ implores the Englishman to improve his behaviour in order to become a moral example for ‘al nacions’ (sig. A4r). The implication that the Englishman might embark on the construction of an outfit less troubling to
English national identity demonstrates that in this image the naked body functions as a blank, unpolluted base upon which exemplary or subversive visual identities may be constructed.

Boorde’s text does not explicitly invite viewers of the emblem of the naked Englishman to construct or contribute to the making of the man’s appearance in their imaginations. The emblematic presentation of Boorde’s account of the Englishman encourages interactive modes of reception, however, as readers are required to piece together the verbal and visual elements of an emblem in order to arrive at an overall meaning. Significantly, blank and unadorned spaces are deployed elsewhere in early modern culture in connection with interactive readers and viewers. In Johann Posthius’s *Anthologia Gnomica* (1579), Jost Amman’s illustrations included blank spaces to be completed by the user (figure 19).

![Woodcut](image_url)

Woodcut
Suzanne Karr Schmidt suggests that *Anthologia Gnomica* was ‘designed and used as an autograph album in which travelling students collected the signatures and witticisms of their teachers and classmates’. The playful interactivity of Amman’s illustrations arguably partakes of a broader European interest in the aesthetic role of blank spaces, particularly in the context of monumental structures. Armando Petrucci explains that in the seventeenth century, ‘empty plaques’ were increasingly popular in Italian churches and the decorative schemes of aristocratic buildings. Petrucci characterises the proliferation of blank plaques as a process of the ‘negation of writing’ which ‘enticed viewers into the game of interpretation and placed them in the role of protagonist and even inventor of verbal meaning’. Blank plaques are used in seventeenth-century English monuments, such as the Fane family monument in St Leonard’s, Apethorpe, where a large blank plaque is displayed on the far side of the monument.

One of the most important aesthetic functions of blankness in the period was its use in the negotiation of religious sensitivities attendant on post-Reformation visual culture. In this context, figurative images are replaced with symbolic, blank and often more aesthetically abstract designs. The most obvious example of the latter is the whitewashing of religious wall paintings in pre-Reformation church interiors. Perhaps the most pertinent act of early modern English visual displacement, however, is the avoidance of figurative depictions of God through the presentation of an orange sun-like sphere inscribed with Tetragrammaton, ‘the four Hebrew letters that correspond to YHWH (God’s name, Yahweh)’. Hamling explains that the deployment of the Tetragrammaton in the stained-glass window in the Mildmay chapel in St Leonard’s, Apethorpe, produces a ‘modified iconography’ that in reformist terms was ‘not unacceptable’.

The Tetragrammaton is also deployed in Trevilian’s depiction of the creation of Eve, who is shown emerging from Adam’s side into the light of a blazing Tetragrammaton situated directly behind the pair. The use of the Tetragrammaton in the portrayal of divine creation acutely highlights the difficulties attendant on visual depictions of acts of ‘making’ in this period. God is frequently referred to as an ‘artificer’, ‘workman’, he who ‘framed’ the earth, and yet even this originary creator cannot be shown completing the human material practices that these terms described. The making of Eve from Adam’s rib, much like the transformation of Hermione’s statue in *The Winter’s Tale*, takes place without the ‘touch’ of an intangible God, but in the symbolic presence of an unrepresentable divinity.

How does this aesthetics of blankness function in the context of early modern drama, where audiences are encouraged to ‘make up the difference’ in light of what may be missing on stage? I will return here to the quotation discussed at the outset of this chapter, from Lyly’s *Euphues and His England*, in which Euphues produces an image of Elizabeth that is ‘but begun for others to end’. This...
Making and unmaking in early modern English drama

Theoretical model for making an incomplete image provides the foundations for the court drama *Campaspe*, first performed at court and at the Blackfriars theatre in 1584. The play presents the story of Alexander the Great’s love for Campaspe, who in turn falls in love with Apelles, who has been commissioned by Alexander to paint Campaspe’s portrait. The prologue for the play’s performance at the court sets up interactive relationships between spectators and the play-world, through allusions to modes of visual reshaping:

> Whatever we present we wish it may be thought the dancing of Agrippa his shadows, who in the moment they were seen were of any shape one would conceive. (Prologue at the Court, 13–15)

The construction of the play as a fleeting visual impression which may change shape in the minds of spectators reflects the duality of meaning presented in the drama, which in this sense is very similar to *Henry V*. Lyly, for example, presents Alexander as a conqueror who displays ‘courtesy’ (I.i.2), and is interested in peaceful, intellectual pursuits such as meeting with philosophers including Aristotle and Plato. At the same time, however, this ‘meeting’ with the philosophers is not an open intellectual debate, as Alexander warns them that ‘in king’s causes’, he ‘will not stand to scholar’s arguments’, and that their ‘lives’ are ‘answerable’ to their ‘learnings’ (I.iii.89–93). Such revelations in the dialogue of a more threatening side to Alexander perhaps alert the audience to the fact that a less flattering depiction of the monarch can be gleaned from the performance. In particular, aspects of the play depict Alexander in an extremely demeaning manner. Most significantly for my argument, *Campaspe* hints at the weakness of the king by showing him failing to complete the production of a visual image. In one scene, Alexander attends Apelles’s workshop, and, during his visit, attempts to draw, ordering Apelles: ‘Lend me thy pencil … I will paint and thou shalt judge’ (III.iv.112). Almost as soon as he begins to draw, Alexander’s ‘coal breaks’, and he is advised ‘you lean too hard’. Attempting accordingly to lessen the pressure with which he applies the pencil, Alexander finds that the charcoal ‘blacks not’ (III.iv.115–17). After persevering for a short while, the monarch petulantly abandons the attempt:

> Alexander This is awry.
> Apelles Your eye goeth not with your hand.
> Alexander Now it is worse.
> Apelles Your hand goeth not with your mind.
> Alexander Nay, if all be too hard or soft, so many rules and regards that one’s hand, one’s eye, one’s mind must all draw together, I had rather be setting at a battle than blotting of a board. (III.iv.119–26)

It cannot be said with certainty that the audience would have seen what Alexander draws. There are no stage directions about the image itself, and it is unclear what Alexander draws on, let alone what he is trying to represent. Even if the audience...
could not see Alexander’s unsuccessful representation, however, this scene would remain a very visual demonstration of the king’s limitations, from the moment at which ‘Alexander takes the charcoal and draws’ (III.iv.112SD), through the visible frustration and anxiety in the faces of both patron and painter, to the moment that the king finally replaces the charcoal in a clear sign of his artistic failure. Lyly began the play in appeals to the court audience, which included Elizabeth, to consider *Campaspe* to be ‘any shape’ they would ‘conceive’. In the ‘drawing-lesson’ scene, the dramatist exposes the limitations of kingship through the demonstration of a monarch’s failure to complete a visual image. The play is the uncarved timber, the unengraved brass of Parrhasius’s anecdote, prepared for the impressions imprinted upon it by the audience. Using the empty ‘frame without a face’ as a conceptual framework for his drama, Lyly shifts the agency of image-making from monarch to subject-spectator. There is, however, no sense that this play could ever be anything but permanently under construction, since it is only ‘in the moment’ that the events of the play are ‘seen’ that spectators may ‘shape’ the play as they conceive. The base for interpretation offered in *Campaspe* is not only unfinished, it may be constantly remoulded and is thus unfinishable.

For a court writer such as Lyly, the constant deferral of the completion of a work in the presentation of a play as constantly ‘under construction’, is the only means appropriate for the production of a representation of a head of state. The deferral of meaning in plays such as *Campaspe* and *Henry V*, identified by Greenblatt as central to the containment of the subversion that is ‘the very condition of power’, can here be characterised as a form of blankness. A bare ‘frame without a face’ may hold the potential to be filled out with transgressive ideas, but it is also the vehicle for expression upon which divine hierarchy insists for the making of representations. As symbolised in Alexander’s swiftly aborted drawing lesson in *Campaspe*, the early modern English social framework restricted kings, as much as non-royal image-makers, to the production of unfinished material. In this context, discourses of making offer a means through which audiences, visual artists, writers and authority figures may negotiate the political sensitivities attendant on the making and consumption of verbal and visual representations. Frequent allusions to states of incompletion, however, draw attention to the unstable relationship between meaning, interpretation and the parameters which may shape a work even as that work is described as unfinished. The blank canvases presented by the examples that I have discussed so far are thus part of a growing consciousness about what is invested socially and culturally in the moments at which processes of making begin and end.

‘Never ending it til they be caught with it’: the idolatry of ‘finish’

*Campaspe* fully demonstrates the contested status of ‘finish’ in late sixteenth-century England. The problem faced by Apelles and Alexander in this play is that
in commissioning the portrait of Campaspe, the royal patron requires the painter to produce something more than a ‘frame without a face’. From the conclusion of the scene in which Alexander the Great fails to learn to draw, therefore, a tussle develops between Apelles and his royal patron over the final completion and delivery of the portrait of Campaspe. Almost as soon as Alexander has set down the charcoal in humiliating defeat in Apelles’s shop, Alexander tells the painter that ‘Campaspe is finished as I wish; dismiss her and bring presently her counterfeit after me’ (III.iv.129–30). Alexander here exerts his divinely ordained authority by declaring the portrait finished ‘as I wish’; Apelles, in turn, is distraught by his patron’s demand, as the ending of the portrait will entail the end of his access to Campaspe. The painter’s reaction to the order, however, reveals the interdependence between ‘finish’ and image-breaking, as Apelles resolves ‘by device’ to give the portrait ‘a blemish’ in order to prolong the painting process and to declare his love to Campaspe (III.v.67). Apelles’s choice to physically deface his own picture implies that the portrait has indeed reached a stage of completion and cannot be further perfected, or that Apelles accepts Alexander’s concept of ‘finish’. The painter’s application of ‘blemish’ to Campaspe’s portrait thus draws attention to the extent to which the destruction of an image is stimulated by its supposed completeness. Such a link between the breaking of images and their perfection can also be read into the idea of iconoclasm, since the impact of the destruction of an object is invested in the presence of belief in the ‘wholeness’ of the item destroyed. Certainly, the devotional objects which became the subject of iconoclasm during the Reformation are, as Aura Satz suggests, associated with ‘finitude’, since ‘their sacred status is partly reliant on being conclusively polished … canonized in both form and meaning’. Satz exemplifies this view with reference to the story of St Luke painting the Virgin. In this story, St Luke begins this painting when the Virgin appears to him in a vision; before he can complete the image, however, it miraculously completes itself. As Satz states, it is its ‘finite’ completion ‘by the agent of the divine hand’ that makes a devotional object sacred.

The story of St Luke as the first ‘Christian painter’ was a popular theme for sixteenth-century visual artists, with depictions of the evangelist painting the Virgin frequently commissioned for display in guild buildings. Paintings of this legend were made by, for example, the follower of Quinten Massys, around 1520, Jan Gossaert in 1520–25 and Giorgio Vasari in 1570–71 (figures 20–2). The earlier painting by the follower of Massys is the inner part of the right shutter of an altarpiece; also surviving from this shutter is A Female Figure Standing in a Niche, and both paintings are held by the National Gallery, London. As he works on what appears as a very completed portrait of the Virgin, St Luke looks towards the divine sitter, who was presumably depicted in the central part of the altarpiece. The ox resting at the painter’s feet identifies him as St Luke, but beyond this symbolism there is little in this altarpiece fragment to indicate the
113.7 x 34.9 cm
miraculous nature of the painting process depicted. In contrast, Jan Gossaert’s painting, which is in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, shows St Luke drawing an as yet incomplete portrait of the Virgin and child, his hand guided by an angel. This was the second time that Gossaert had painted St Luke as the painter of the Virgin. A painting on the same theme, composed between 1512 and 1515 and now in the National Gallery of Prague, presents ‘a straightforward image of the artist and his model’, and does not emphasise the miraculous nature of the scene as does the later painting. Clifton Olds argues that the change in Gossaert’s approach to the legend of St Luke in the later picture demonstrates a direct response to ‘the growing threat of iconoclasm’. The developments in
Gossaert’s paintings of St Luke suggest the significance of this story of miraculous painting for professional visual practice. The theme of St Luke painting the Virgin provided defence against Reformation attacks on the production and worship of religious images, since if ‘this divinely inspired writer of the Gospel should find it permissible to paint a picture of the Virgin, then certainly such an activity was sanctioned by God’. This connection between professional and miraculous visual artistry is also suggested by the example of Vasari’s fresco, commissioned for the chapel of the Accademia delle Arti del Disegno, Florence, an institution which Vasari helped to found in 1563, and which was dedicated to
the promotion of painting in Tuscany. The extent to which St Luke provides a mobilising figure for sixteenth-century painters is suggested by the fact that in his treatment of the legend of St Luke, Vasari presents a portrait of himself as the evangelist. This legend is thus a story of a miracle that facilitates professional painterly practice and instructs spectators in accepting that practice as legitimate and capable of the attainment of divine perfection.

Although sixteenth-century English painters do not seem to have depicted St Luke as frequently as did painters in continental Europe, there is evidence that this subject was known in the British Isles. For example, St Luke is associated with painting in a painted panel that once decorated the ceiling of the gallery at Dean House, Edinburgh, home of William Nisbet, Lord Provost of Edinburgh.
in 1616 and 1622 (figure 23). The panel, thought to have been painted between 1605 and 1627, shows St Luke reading; on the table-top at his side rest a pallet with daubs of colour, and four paintbrushes. In the left corner the ox sits at the foot of a slanted wooden post that could be interpreted as a part of the evangelist’s easel.

It is tempting to suggest that St Luke is shown reading rather than painting in this panel because of post-Reformation preference for the word over the image. This suggestion should be tempered, however, by the fact that not all pre-Reformation depictions of St Luke-as-painter show this figure engaged in visual activity. For example, in the Robertet Book of Hours, by Jean Fouquet, dated to 1460–65 and now in the Pierpont Library, New York, St Luke is shown writing the Gospel, his back turned to a painting of the Virgin propped against the wall. Moreover, aspects of the iconography of St Luke appeared on the early modern English stage. St Luke is also the patron saint of butchers, and in George Chapman, Ben Jonson and John Marston’s *Eastward Ho!,* Slitgut, a butcher’s apprentice, displays ‘a pair of ox-horns’, which he has been ordered to ‘set up, in honour of Saint Luke’ and as ‘a crest’ of his ‘master’s profession’. Invoking the horns of the cuckold, Slitgut’s deployment of the ox’s horns is very different in tone to the reverence for St Luke shown in paintings of this figure. This example, however, indicates that playgoers in early modern London were familiar with the iconography of this artisan-saint.

The divinity of completion in the legend of St Luke arguably provides an important context for the resistance of material completion in Lyly’s play. Where this legend of a miraculous icon was used to justify visual artists’ participation in a divinely sanctioned activity, in *Campaspe,* the impermissibility of reaching aesthetic perfection in the making of a secular image produces destructively idolatrous results. Apelles’s deliberate defacement of the portrait causes a delay in the delivery of the work that heightens Alexander and his confidant Hephestion’s suspicions about the painter’s attachment to both portrait and sitter. Hephestion muses that the painter’s avoidance of ‘finish’ is a symptom of idolatry:

> Commonly we see it incident in artificers to be enamoured of their own works, as Archidamus of his wooden dove, Pygmalion of his ivory image, Arachne of his wooden swan – especially painters, who, playing with their own conceits, now coveting to draw a glancing eye, then a rolling, now a winking, still mending it, never ending it till they be caught with it. And then, poor souls, they kiss the colours with their lips, with which before they were loath to taint their fingers. (V.iv.15–24)

Here, ‘ending’ is only achieved in the consummation of idolatrous desire, as the painter plays with the image until ‘caught with it’; the finality of this consummation is, however, destructive. The ‘colours’ that the painters kiss are the same that may be lifted and smudged during the painting process, and in touching their paintings with their lips, the ‘poor souls’ risk defacing the representations
that they adore. The idolatrous defacement of the image thus parallels the
cycle of unending recycling, ‘playing with their own conceits’ that builds up to
an idolatrous, unsatisfactory ‘ending’. Hephestion’s characterisation of paint-
ers ‘finishing’ their works as so idolatrous as to be destructive emphasises the
impermissibility of the ‘completed’ image within the early modern English
imagination. The impasse reached between the painter and the royal patron in
the production of the royal image that neither can complete can now be under-
stood as aggravated by the treacherous, idolatrous risks associated with image
production. Campaspe’s portrait exists in a state of continual remaking that is
transgressive in that it is symptomatic of idolatry, but necessary in order to avoid
the idolatrous achievement of finish. In *Campaspe*, the solution to this impasse
derives from a context of violence against images.

As the head of state who cannot draw within a cultural framework in which
completion is unreachable, Alexander turns to the threat of the destruction of
visual images to end Apelles’s idolatrous disobedience and to recuperate his
own reputation as king. Hoping to prompt Apelles to reveal that he is in love
with Campaspe, Alexander orders a pageboy to frighten Apelles into thinking
that his ‘shop is on fire’ (V.iv.91). An alarmed Apelles immediately laments: ‘Ay
me, if the picture of Campaspe be burnt I am undone!’ as he ‘starts for the shop’
(V.iv.92–3SD). This exclamation enables Alexander to coax from Apelles that he
loves the Theban prisoner, and consequently the king is able to seem to benevo-
lently unite the lovers, whom he refers to as ‘two loving worms’, and tells to
‘enjoy one another’ (V.iv.141–6). At this point Alexander presents a new version
of himself as a monarch who can ‘resist love as he list’, stating that ‘it were a
shame Alexander should desire to command the world if he could not command
himself’ (V.iv.165–9). The threat of the destruction of an image thus facilitates
the production of a new, appealing perspective on Alexander that would have
been highly flattering to the royal audience at the play’s court performance.

Most significantly for my concern with Lyly’s use of the idea of the break-
ing of images to combat the idolatrous implications of cultural production,
this restoration of order circumvents Apelles’s idolatrous relationship with
Campaspe’s portrait, as his affection is fully diverted into state-sanctioned union
with the ‘real’ Campaspe. Significantly, the portrait, and the topic of painting in
general, are not mentioned in the play from the point in the final scene at which
Alexander states that ‘Apelles … loveth underhand’, and begins to formulate the
union between the lovers (V.iv.111). As Campaspe and Apelles are created as a
couple by Alexander, the disruptive portrait becomes redundant, and is erased
from the immediate concerns of the play-world. In the ‘drawing lesson’ scene,
Alexander’s limitations are signified by his failure to complete a satisfactory
visual representation. Subsequent to this failure, the threat of the destruction of
an image, and the absence of that image and the practicalities of its production,
enable the presentation of a ‘new’ version of the central characters, in which the
subversive desires of Alexander’s subjects are depicted as chiming reverentially with the king’s own self-control.

Campaspe does not present the actual destruction of an image, but the play does demonstrate the usefulness of the concept of image-breaking for the negotiation of the idolatrous implications of image-making. The avoidance of the destruction of the portrait can be linked to the same contexts of making that produce the deferral of the completion of images throughout the play, since if it is impossible for earthly hands to perfect a visual representation, then it must also be impossible for an image to be obliterated by mortal means. By invoking the threat of the breaking of an image, rather than showing the destruction of that image, Lyly therefore incorporates the idea of iconoclasm into the continual deferral of completion that shapes his play. Importantly, while completion and full destruction are inaccessible within the play-world, audiences are fully encouraged to participate in the deferral of both. The notion of the destruction of images thus becomes a part of Lyly’s broader understanding of image-making as an unending process of shaping and reshaping in which spectators may participate, approaching the play as ‘wax’ from which they ‘may make doves or vultures, roses or nettles, laurel for a garland or elder for a disgrace’ (Epilogue at the Court, 18–20).

Notes

5 On Lyly and incompletion see also my ‘Idolatry, Iconoclasm and Agency’, 4.
8 See, for example, David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (eds), The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe (London: Routledge, 1997), p. xi; see also Margaret E. Owens, Stages of Dismemberment: The Fragmented Body in Late Medieval and Early Modern Drama (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2005). Memory is discussed in relation to a fragmentary materiality in Jones and Stallybrass, Renaissance Clothing. The notion of the stable, unified early modern text has been dislodged.


16 The word is used in the following phrase: ‘the same … surseased and were lefte of unfynysshed’, Albert Feuillerat, *Documents Relating to the Revels at Court in the Time of King Edward VI and Queen Mary* (Louvain: A. Uystpruyst, 1914), p. 150, quoted in the *OED*. For the earliest use of ‘finished’, the *OED* cites Richard Stanyhurst’s 1582 translation of Virgil’s *The Aeneid*: ‘at leingth kept he silence, with finnyshed historye resting’, *The First foure booke of Virgil his Aeneis translated*; … wyth oother poetical divises, ed. Edward Arber (1880), p. 93.


18 Edward Blount, preface to *Micro-cosmographie*, sigs A2v–A3r.

19 Blount, preface to *Micro-cosmographie*, sig. A3r.

20 Oliver Cromwell refers to articles which ‘may tend to the completion of the business’, *Letters and Speeches*, ed. T. Carlyle, vol. 2 (New York: Wiley & Putnam, 1845), p. 326; also quoted in the *OED*.


27 See Baker, *Plain Ugly*, p. 158. Farah Karim-Cooper argues that post-Reformation humanism advanced a gradual movement away from ‘the notion that the body belonged to God’, although this idea continued to inform ‘cosmetic arguments’, *Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 36.


34 Wiseman, ‘Popular Culture’, p. 16.
36 See Roy Strong, *Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1987). Montrose cautions that in observing the ‘extravagant metaphorical language’ used to describe Elizabeth, we must maintain an awareness of ‘the nuanced and coy performativity at the heart of Elizabethan courtly culture’, *The Subject of Elizabeth*, pp. 106–7.
39 Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, p. 64; Montrose, *The Subject of Elizabeth*, p. 221.
40 Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage*, pp. 73–4.
41 Anon, *Thomas of Woodstock or King Richard II Part One*, ed. Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge, *The Revels Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 3.1.81–92. All subsequent references to *Thomas of Woodstock* are to this edition and noted in the text.
44 Kalas, *Frame, Glass, Verse*, p. 29.
46 Andrew Boorde, *The fyrst boke of the introduction of knowledge* (London: William Copland, 1555?), sig. A2r. All subsequent references are to this edition.
51 Thomas Dekker, *The Seven deadly Sinnes of London: Drawne in Seven Severall Coaches, Through the Seven Severall gates of the Citie Bringing the Plague with them* (London: printed by E. A for Nathaniel Butter, 1606), pp. 31–2. All subsequent references are to this edition.
52 Hentschell, ‘Treasonous Textiles’, 548; the emphasis is Hentschell’s.
Elam, ‘English Bodies’, p. 29.


According to the OED, a now obsolete meaning for the word ‘platform’ as a ‘drawing, sketch or diagram’ was in use from around 1544 until the late eighteenth century.


Petrucci, *Public Lettering*, p. 45.

Hamling, *Decorating the ‘Godly’ Household*, p. 58.


75 Chapman, ‘The Imagined Studios of Rembrandt and Vermeer’, p. 112.


81 See Hamling, *Decorating the ‘Godly’ Household*, p. in 192.

