The Insistence of Art

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Published by Fordham University Press
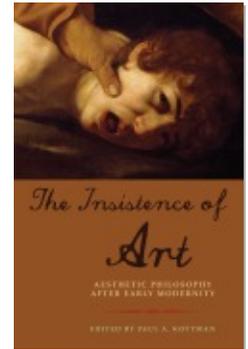
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Allegory, Poetic Theology, and Enlightenment Aesthetics

Victoria Kahn

Included in Giovanni Pietro Bellori's *Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1672) is an engraving of an allegorical figure of "wise imitation" (*imitatio sapiens*), which Stephen Halliwell has described in the following way: "Classically draped and seated inside an architectural perspective, [she] self-admiringly gazes into a mirror, symbol of her own idealized potential, but simultaneously treads resolutely on an unprepossessing 'ape,' traditional metaphor for the debasement of mimesis into the empty simulation of a world of vulgarly reflective surfaces."[1] This allegorical figure of imitation aptly illustrates two common (and ultimately entwined) ways of telling the story of the relation of the Renaissance to the history of aesthetics. One version is a story of the rupture with the Middle Ages brought about by the recovery of the classical traditions of rhetoric and poetics, and their various ideas of the imitation of nature or nature's laws. A second version concedes the superficial continuity of allegorical interpretation from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance, while emphasizing the Renaissance break with habits of medieval allegorizing. Instead of gods and goddesses in medieval dress, we find a new sense of historical anachronism and a new attention to the formal properties of ancient art

and art more generally, properties which in turn provoke imitation on the part of Renaissance artists. Particularly in this second story, Renaissance art is described as gradually liberating itself from the theological strictures of medieval theorizing and as anticipating something like the autonomy of the eighteenth-century aesthetic artifact, with its formal purposiveness for disinterested contemplation.[2]

Ultimately, as Bellori's image suggests, these two stories are two aspects of the same rich development of Renaissance art. But for the purposes of this essay, I would like to tell the story of Renaissance aesthetics from the perspective of the long history of allegorical interpretation, not least of all because of the prominent role Kant has frequently played as the telos of this narrative. In my version, however, this is a story not so much of rupture as of transformation, one in which Aristotelian and rhetorical ideas of imitation commingle with late antique and medieval traditions of Neoplatonic allegorizing. As in the other stories, so in this one the Renaissance could be said to discover the autonomy of artistic form. But I argue that it is conceding too much to the eighteenth-century discourse of aesthetics to say that Renaissance ideas of form are important because they anticipate Immanuel Kant, as Ernst Cassirer and Erwin Panofsky were wont to do. Instead, it is better to see the Renaissance as helping us historicize the idea of the aesthetic. That is, it helps us understand that the aesthetic is not a Hegelian idea that achieves its full realization only at a certain moment in history or indeed at the end of history. Instead, even as we concede that something new emerges with the idea of aesthetic appreciation as disinterested contemplation in the eighteenth century, it is possible to trace a distinctive Renaissance engagement with questions of aesthetics that contributes to later notions of the autonomy of art, at the same time that it complicates any attempt to locate the origin of aesthetics in the eighteenth century.

The use of the term *aesthetics* is not common in the scholarship on the Renaissance. In the Renaissance, as in antiquity, art, it's argued, was most often seen in a moral, pedagogical, rhetorical, and pragmatic context rather than being conceived in purely aesthetic terms.[3] Although Renaissance artists were just as preoccupied with the rhetorical and ethical failures of art to persuade to virtue as with its successes, such rhetorical failure was, according to this argument, not yet recuperated as a higher form of art: the aesthetic conception of the work of art as an autonomous artifact designed for the sole purpose of the reader's or viewer's pleasure was still only rarely articulated.[4] But perhaps in our attention to programmatic defenses of poetry, explicit statements about the rhetorical function of art, or

examples of art's failure to persuade, we have been looking in the wrong places for the Renaissance contribution to the history of aesthetics. Once we turn to the history of reading, specifically of allegorical hermeneutics, we find a new attention to the form-giving power of the artist and reader that helps unhinge art from its previous rhetorical, ethical, and in some cases theological frameworks in ways that have something in common with aspects of the Enlightenment notion of the aesthetic. It is the argument of this essay that we can track the gradual emergence of something like the autonomous aesthetic artifact by looking to the history of allegorical interpretation from antiquity through the Renaissance. If, in antiquity and the Middle Ages, allegory was a mode of reading both classical and Christian texts, by the time of the Renaissance the dual influence of scripture and classical culture led to a new historical consciousness of their differences and to a crisis of how to read this dual heritage. Ancient, medieval, and Renaissance writers distinguished between theological allegory and literary allegory, between allegory as a description of the cosmos and allegory as a rhetorical mode or product of human invention. The negotiation between these two concepts of allegory and the eventual preeminence of the latter in the Renaissance helped produce a new concept of literature and a new concept of literary reading as inseparable from the artist's and reader's own hermeneutical activity. The Renaissance focus on the interpretive activity of giving form deserves as much of a place in the history of aesthetics as the centrality of aesthetic contemplation and judgment in Kant's account of aesthetic experience.

In the Renaissance history of aesthetics, the notion of poetic theology—the idea that the first theologians were poets who concealed theological truths under the allegorical veil of fiction—had an important role to play. This is because poetic theology condenses in one concept the complicated relationship between theological and literary allegory. If poetic theology, in the early Renaissance, is the hinge between theology and poetry, in time it comes to signify the emergence of aesthetics from the bonds of theology. Tracing the history of poetic theology and allegorical interpretation thus helps remind us that the chief accomplishment of Renaissance culture was a break with the medieval subordination of art to theology and metaphysics, and a renewed attention to what Ernst Cassirer and Erwin Panofsky called "the problem of form" and the form-giving capacity of human beings.[5]

Renaissance writers could have learned about the classical tradition of poetic theology from Saint Augustine's paraphrase of Marcus Terentius Varro in *The City of God*. According to Augustine, Varro divided theology into mythical theology (a poetic theology or theology of fables); physical

theology (the theology of the philosophers attempting to explain the nature of the gods and the physical universe); and civil theology (the political theology used by the city). Augustine went on to criticize Varro's effort to distinguish between mythical and civil theology, arguing that mythical theology—"the theology of the theater and stage"—is merely a part of civil theology because "poetry and priestcraft are allied in a fellowship of deception."[6] According to Augustine, the false gods of the ancients cannot promise true happiness, which is to say eternal life; this can only be the gift of the true God of Christianity. Renaissance writers took up the idea of poetic theology as a way of negotiating the conflict between antiquity and Christianity, classical myth and Catholic theology, but it also proved to be one avenue for the emergence of a new concept of art and literature in the period. In elaborating their theories of poetic theology, Renaissance writers drew on the ancient and medieval view of allegory as a practice of reading as well as one of writing, and this practice proved to be a vehicle of literary and, more broadly, cultural innovation. The history of poetic theology and the related history of allegory both contributed to the emergence of a new concept of literature and the new discipline of aesthetics. In order to understand how poetic theology and allegory facilitated these developments in the Renaissance, we need to turn first to antiquity and the Middle Ages.

Already in antiquity, as we see from Varro, something like poetic theology existed in the form of allegorical interpretation of myth and pagan theology.[7] Many Greeks and Romans evinced skepticism about the literal truth of myth and of the pagan gods, but were willing to accept these myths as poetic representations of deeper cosmological truths. The Stoics read Homer as an allegory of cosmic forces, and Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* argued that previous generations had handed down ancient wisdom in the form of myth.[8] In late antiquity, Porphyry and Proclus developed an allegorical hermeneutics predicated on the idea that great poetry, such as Homer's, was not mimetic in Plato's sense but rather enigmatic and symbolic of higher theological truths. And Dionysius the Areopagite applied Proclus's ideas about allegory to Christian rituals and sacraments.[9] In all these cases, allegory could be considered the moral and philosophical antidote to myth, literally construed.[10] As a technique of interpretation, allegory saved classical mythology by making it possible "to associate the most scandalous of narratives and bizarre details to deep truths."[11] In this way, allegory preserved myth both for the ancients and for its later revival in Renaissance poetic theology and in romantic poetry.

Equally important for the later reception of classical myth and the later understanding of literature, ancient poetic theology was an unstable compound that threatened to precipitate a new self-consciousness about the fictions of theology. For some, allegorical interpretation of myth was a vehicle of critique and demystification. In the third century BCE, Euhemerus, nicknamed "the atheist," explained the origin of myth in the superstitions of popular religion and the divinizing of great men.[12] In Cicero's *De natura deorum*, Vellius the Epicurean described Plato's creator God in the *Timaeus* as "a figment of the imagination," and asserted, "When we speak of Jupiter, we mean ether. When we speak of Ceres, we mean the earth."[13] Vellius explicitly connected such "philosophical fantasies" of gods who care for humans with the "fictions of the poets," which he judged to be superstitious and harmful.[14] The Academic skeptic Cotta went even further and argued against Vellius: "If [the gods] are real only as ideas in our minds, and have no solidity or substantial form, what is the difference between imagining god and imagining a centaur?"[15] Cicero's Stoic, Balbus, who defended the existence of the gods, agreed with Vellius in condemning the anthropomorphic understanding of the gods as "fable."[16] For Balbus, it was important to distinguish true religion from myth, interpreted allegorically. To this, Cotta objected that if allegorical interpretations are false, why engage in them, as the Stoics tended to do? "Whether the poets have corrupted the Stoic philosophers, or the philosophers have given authority to the poets, it would be hard to say. They both deal in marvels and monstrosities."[17] In Cotta's view, "Such fables must be discredited, if religion itself is not to be brought into confusion and disrepute."[18]

Balbus's and Cotta's concerns received a new twist in the Christian Middle Ages. As Étienne Gilson has observed, the specific problem for Christianity was that its own truth was expressed not in the language of philosophy, but in poetry.[19] Christianity could not simply condemn the figurative expressions of the Bible—for example, the biblical metaphor of God as a lion—as Plato and Cotta had condemned myth. It was necessary instead to find a true meaning in such expressions, and this produced the medieval allegorical interpretation of scripture. The allegorical interpretation of the anthropomorphic God of scripture on the part of someone like Origen (third century CE) was also designed to refute pagan philosophers who charged that the biblical representation of God was indecorously mythological.[20] Some medieval theologians distinguished the scriptural use of literary figures from secular literary allegory. In the *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas contrasted the use of figurative language in poetry, which

simply hides its lack of truth, to the use of figurative language in scripture, which makes the otherwise incomprehensible divine truth accessible.[21]

Even more important was the distinction drawn by Aquinas and others between theological allegory, the revelation of God's truth in history, and literary allegory, a mere rhetorical trope. For Hugh of Saint Victor (twelfth century) and Nicholas of Lyra (fourteenth century), it was important to distinguish between figurative speech such as metaphor that is "part of the *literal* sense of scripture," and allegory that is a theological or spiritual dimension of meaning. Failure to do so led, in their view, to an arbitrary, capricious multiplication of allegorical meanings based on the over-reading of the figurative language of the text.[22] Aquinas, too, insisted that literary allegory was confined to the literal dimension of the text, broadly construed: "In no form of knowledge which is the product of human powers is any but the literal sense to be found, but only in those Scriptures of which the Holy Spirit is the author, man but the instrument. [Hence] . . . poetic images refer to something else only so as to signify them; and so a signification of that sort goes no way beyond the manner in which the literal sense signifies." As Denys Turner comments, Aquinas's description of poetic images applies to both secular literature and the literal dimension of scripture, while true theological allegory is reserved to scripture alone because such allegory "is not a semantic property of the *words* of Scripture, but is the meaning of actual *events* . . . that Scripture narrates through those words."[23] Theological allegory was an *allegoria in factis*, that is, it defined an allegorical relationship between earlier and later historical events. Erich Auerbach called this kind of relationship *figura*, by which the events in the Old Testament prefigure those in the New.[24]

Whereas medieval theologians wanted to distinguish between theological and literary allegory, some medieval poets encouraged their confusion. In an elegant argument too complicated to do justice to here, Albert R. Ascoli has argued that Dante, as poet and reader of his own work, deliberately conflated the allegory of poets and theologians, as well as allegory as a mode of writing and allegoresis as a mode of reading. Through a process of self-commentary, he made his own work the equal of the ancients and, in doing so, gestured "towards modern notions of authorial reflexivity and intentionality."[25] Similarly, Rita Copeland and Peter Struck have argued that Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun "found that they could play with accepted distinctions between allegory as verbal trope and allegory as theological or cosmological truth, in order to lay claim to much greater authority than traditionally accorded secular poetry."[26] The importance of the poet-theologian only increased in the Renaissance, not least because

of the enormous revival of interest in the literary achievements and poetic theology of antiquity. But the greater prestige of vernacular poetry also played a role, a prestige owing in large part to Dante. As Charles Trinkaus has argued, "It is difficult to separate [poetry's] new status from the enormous impact that Dante's *Divina Commedia* had in the fourteenth century within a generation of his death."[27]

The consensus of intellectual historians is that, although the allegorical tradition of interpretation persisted in the Renaissance, the defining characteristic of this period was a new perception of the historical difference between antiquity and the present, and a new appreciation of the distinctiveness of classical forms. Instead of using allegorical hermeneutics to erase the difference between past and present, to paper over the enormous rupture created by the emergence of Christianity, and to insist on a transhistorical continuity of meaning or "content," Renaissance readers and writers focused instead on what Cassirer has called "the problem of form." They focused, that is, on what in ancient culture resisted assimilation, flaunted its anachronism, and in so doing provoked admiration and emulation.[28] I am in general agreement with this account of the period's defining virtues. But what I think deserves more attention is the shifting role of allegorical interpretation in these developments. If, in the beginning of the Renaissance, allegory provided an overarching hermeneutic that permitted the reconciliation of ancient texts and Christian doctrine, in time the new profusion of classical texts and the Renaissance encounter with them provoked a crisis of allegorical reading, further destabilizing the distinction between theological and literary allegory. Instead of mediating divine truth, poetic theology became a vehicle for attending to poetic form. Instead, that is, of referring to a transcendent signified, poetic theology tipped on its axis and became the name of a human capacity. In the process, allegory as human invention supplanted allegory as a description of the cosmos or as the revelation of truth in history. In time, allegory became another name for the reader's construction of meaning, as well as a sign of the autonomous literary artifact.

In these developments, the interpretation of classical myth had an important role to play.[29] The classical allegorical interpretation of myth was known in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, but the problem posed by ancient myth was now more complex than it was for ancient philosophers because pagan allegory existed alongside the Christian tradition of the allegorical interpretation of the Bible.[30] For Renaissance humanists interested in the recovery of classical texts, the problem of interpretation was particularly acute. What was the relationship between classical literature

and scripture, and what was the relationship between their modes of figuration? If both used allegory, how did one differentiate between them? A relatively early figure like the Florentine chancellor Coluccio Salutati still argued that, in contrast to pagan myth, which was literally false, or false on the surface, scripture was true both literally and figuratively.[31] Later humanists seemed less inclined to take this route, but this then made it even more difficult to distinguish between scripture and myth. Whereas the problem for ancient writers had been how to make sense of unruly anthropomorphic gods and the fantastic elements of myth, the problem for Renaissance writers was how to interpret classical myth allegorically in a way that did not threaten the allegorical truths of the Christian religion—how, in other words, to distinguish one kind of allegory from another. Given the etymology of allegory as speaking otherwise, we can say that the Renaissance—with its psychomachia of Christianity and classical culture, its confrontation with Christianity's pagan other—is the preeminent allegorical moment.

In one sense, allegory is always a response to a crisis of reading, a crisis about the literal meaning of the text. But the Renaissance also precipitated a meta-crisis of allegory, understood as the strategy for negotiating or resolving the crisis of literal reading. One characteristic move in the psychomachia of antiquity and Christianity that I have described was simply to continue to argue (as had been done in the Middle Ages) that a classical text such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* allegorized Christian morality. In arguing that pagan poetry contained theological truths that were compatible with or anticipated the truths of Christianity, this kind of reading was a form of poetic theology.[32] But in reinterpreting classical texts allegorically to fit with Christianity, and thus in a certain sense leveling the distinction between them, Renaissance humanists also exposed scripture to a rereading that threatened its unique revelation of divine truth. If in a first movement poetic theology elevated ancient poetry to the level of theology, in a second movement theology could itself be reduced to the level of fiction. Poetic theology, we could then say, was the solvent that produced literature out of scripture. It's this dynamic that I'd like to trace with reference to three exemplary figures: Boccaccio, Ficino, and Erasmus.

In the *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, Boccaccio declares that his intention is to show "the art of the ancient poets and the consanguinity and relations of the false gods."[33] In a first move, the assertion of falseness turns the theology of ancient myth into mere art. But although Boccaccio isolates literature, understood as "the art of the ancient poets," by pointing to the

theological falseness of the pagan gods, he also uses the figurative dimension of scripture to justify literature understood as secular poetry. If critics of poetry condemn it as fiction, he argues, they will also need to condemn much of the Bible. For what the poets call fable or fiction, "our theologians" have named "figure," "parable," or "exemplum."[34] Boccaccio makes no reference to Thomas Aquinas's distinction between the figures of scripture and of poetry; he is not talking about allegory in factis but about the distinction between literal and figurative language. He does, however, mention Varro's argument about "physical theology"—the hiding of physical and moral truths under pagan myth. Varro then allows Boccaccio—in a second move—to recuperate the falseness of pagan literature, making it available to Christian use. In the preface to the *Genealogy*, in response to his patron's request that he explain the meanings wise men have hidden under their tales, Boccaccio comments, "Such interpretations are harder than you think; they are properly the business of the theologian, for Varro in treating of many matters both divine and human holds that such subjects constitute a sort of theology that may properly be called 'mythical,' or as others would say . . . physical." And he adds that in view of "the large element of absurd untruth in mythology, there is the more need of skill in separating true from false."[35] Later, in book 15, he quotes Varro to support his claim that some ancient writers were theologians of the pagan gods, and that their moral teachings could in some instances be "employed in the service of Catholic truth."[36] In this way, allegory comes to be identified with figuration and even fiction, which pleases the unlearned on the surface while it exercises the minds of the learned with its hidden truth. That is, allegory and poetic theology require a certain labor of reading and rereading. One wonders if Boccaccio is remembering here Cicero's etymological derivation of *religio* from *relegere*, to reread, an etymology that Augustine repeated in *The City of God*.[37] But instead of applying it to scripture, Boccaccio applies it to the new religion of literature.

In this way Boccaccio's account of literature vacillates between a cognitive critique and an aesthetic defense. He recounts how, even as a child, he knew "all pagan gods were devils" and disapproved of "their absurd misdeeds," but "their manner of worship aside, the character and words of certain ancient poets have delighted me."[38] In a double movement of reading, he discounts the literal truth of these pagan tales but delights in their poetic language. Elsewhere, Boccaccio emphasizes the harmless pleasure of pagan fiction—harmless because only a pagan would take seriously the mythic representation of anthropomorphic, lustful gods. In this emphasis

on harmless pleasure Boccaccio suggests that Christianity immunizes the reader and thus authorizes a space for secular literature understood as aesthetic play.

But if literature or poetry includes surface artistic embellishment, which is pleasing in itself, it also points to hidden truths. Here Boccaccio distinguishes between an inferior, merely aesthetic, pleasure and a superior pleasure that conduces to moral and theological profit. Anticipating what later humanists would call poetic theology, Boccaccio asserts that poets "won the name of theologians even among the primitive pagans."[39] In arguing for the moral, theological, and philosophical content of poetry, this defense takes place under the auspices of Plato.[40] At the same time, Boccaccio frankly confesses that, where he has not been able to find classical interpretations of ancient myth, he has simply invented them. In allying poetic theology with human invention, Boccaccio suggests that myth is not so much the revelation of divine truth as the preeminent manifestation of the human imagination. This tension between divine truth and human invention is at work in later discussions of poetic theology as well, including in the Florentine Neoplatonism of Marsilio Ficino, the author of a vast synthesis of Christianity and classical philosophy titled *The Platonic Theology* (completed in 1474 and published in 1482).

The Neoplatonists were interested in reconciling Christianity not simply with Greek and Roman mythology but with all religious traditions, including foreign cults. As Jean Seznec has written, "Their attitude [was] no longer one of rationalization [of ancient myth] . . . [but] of believers and mystics, reverently teaching the depths of meaning within a sacred text."[41] It is for this reason, I think, that C. S. Lewis argued that Neoplatonists did not so much read allegorically (if by allegory we understand personification) as symbolically or sacramentally. For Lewis, "the allegorist leaves the given—his own passions—to talk of that which is confessedly less real, which is a fiction. The symbolist leaves the given to find that which is more real."[42] In a sense, one could say that, for Ficino, allegory is neither the allegoria in factis of medieval scriptural commentary nor is it simply a practice of reading. Instead, the cosmos itself is constructed as an allegory, since lowly matter points to higher spiritual reality. Within such a structure, the human soul is a "copula," the bond that links matter and spirit in human nature, which in turn serves as a microcosm of cosmic order.[43]

This view of the cosmos had implications for reading the works of antiquity. Above all, the Neoplatonists believed that Plato conveyed the same sacred truths as Christianity. This in turn meant that Plato himself both wrote allegorically and taught that poetry was enigmatic and should be

read allegorically.[44] If one consequence of this hermeneutic was to lessen the difference between philosophy and religion, Plato and Christ, or—to borrow from Ficino's title—Plato and theology, another consequence was to diminish the distance between philosophy and religion, on the one hand, and poetry, on the other. All were characterized by the distinction between matter and spirit, that is, between the physical representation, figure, or veil, and the hidden spiritual truth. It has been suggested that Ficino's conviction of the agreement between philosophy and religion fostered a general concept of natural religion that prepared the way for deism and religious tolerance.[45] But I think one could also argue, with Michael Allen, that Ficino's syncretism turned poetry into the preeminent mode of philosophy and theology.[46]

Paul Oskar Kristeller argued that Ficino did not really have an aesthetic, if by this we mean a discrete discourse on art as we now understand it. I think this is true but only because the category of art has expanded in Ficino to include all creative forms of human activity. Although Ficino is regularly associated with Platonic idealism and the contemplative ascent from the material world to the world of Ideas, there is a countervailing impulse in Ficino—as in Pico della Mirandola—to celebrate God as not simply a creator but as a maker—an artist or artifex—whose activity serves as a model and authorization of human artistic activity broadly construed.[47] According to Ficino, such creative activity is itself evidence of the immortality of the soul. Just as humans know God by knowing the divine in themselves, in their own souls, so they know divinity in the human activity of culture or cultivation, both physical and spiritual. "Throughout the whole globe how marvelous is [man's] culture of the earth!" Ficino exclaims in book 13 of *The Platonic Theology*. "In inhabiting all the elements and cultivating them all, he performs the office of God [vicem gerit dei]." And later he remarks that the "soul emulates all God's works through its various arts [per varias artes]."[48] Among these cultural activities are government and the liberal arts, including music, rhetoric, and poetry.[49] Ficino also suggests that there is a creative dimension to the production of philosophical texts and to the process of reading, by which we ascend from the material reality of the text to higher spiritual truths. Like the poets, the philosophers veil theological truths with figurative language, and it is the task of the reader to discover the spiritual meaning through a diligent labor of allegorical interpretation: "Wherefore, since Plato had conveyed to the youthful Dionysius certain divine mysteries under a veil, he enjoined him first to examine them diligently. . . . And he added furthermore that the divine mysteries after more frequent, nay unending examination, are

eventually and after great difficulty and labor rendered pure and dazzling like gold."[50] It is true that Ficino vacillates in his account of this process of uncovering spiritual truths, sometimes attributing it to "diligent examination," and sometimes to "divine revelation." But given what Ficino says elsewhere about how the mind comes to recognize divinity within itself, there may not be a substantial difference between the two.

Thus, despite his emphasis on the contemplative ascent to contemplation of God, Ficino's poetic theology contributed powerfully to the Renaissance preoccupation with humanity's form-giving capacity. This was because, in Ficino's view, the soul was itself a principle of form. As Ernst Cassirer argued long ago, Ficino portrayed the human soul as the "copula" or "vinculum" between God and the world because the soul contained an innate "norm of beauty" that allowed it to perceive and judge the beauty of the external world.[51] And this in turn meant that Neoplatonism did not simply authorize a contemplative stance toward the world; it also underwrote the Renaissance preoccupation with man-made aesthetic forms:

> According to Ficino, the whole point of religious and philosophical *knowledge* is nothing other than the eradication from the world of everything that seems deformed; and the recognition that even things that seem formless participate in form. But such knowledge cannot content itself with the mere concept; it must be transformed into action, and prove itself through action. Here begins the contribution of the artist. He can fulfill the requirement that speculation can only state. Man can only be certain that the sense world *has* form and shape if he continually *gives* it form. Ultimately, the beauty of the sensible world does not derive from itself; rather, it is founded in the fact that it becomes, in a sense, the medium *through which* the free creative force of man acts and becomes conscious of itself.[52]

Cassirer went on to adduce Leonardo da Vinci as an example of this approach:

> "O investigator of things," says Leonardo, "do not praise yourself for your knowledge of things brought forth by nature in its normal course; rather enjoy knowing the aim and the end of those things designed by your mind." For Leonardo, *this* is science and art. Science is a second creation of nature brought about by reason, and art is a second creation brought about by the imagination. Reason and imagination no longer confront each other as strangers; for each is simply a different manifestation of the same basic power in man, the power to give form.[53]

In this way, Cassirer ultimately brings Ficino into the fold of those Renaissance figures who anticipate the Kantian critique of judgment:

> The common characteristic joining the world of pure knowledge to that of artistic creation [in the Renaissance] is that both are dominated, in their different ways, by a moment of genuine intellectual generation. In Kantian language, they go beyond any "copy" view of the given; they must become an "architectonic" construction of the cosmos. As science and art become more and more *conscious* that their primary function is to give form, they conceive of the law to which they are subject more and more as the expression of their essential freedom.[54]

Neoplatonism had a powerful impact on the Northern humanist, Desiderius Erasmus, who articulated its assumption about the relation of body to spirit and drew out the implications of its practice of allegorical reading in the *Enchiridion*, or "Handbook of the Militant Christian" (1503). Erasmus argued that reading the pagan poets and philosophers is a good preparation for the Christian life, but only if one reads allegorically: "Just as divine Scripture bears no great fruit if you persist in clinging only to the literal sense, so the poetry of Homer and Virgil is of no small benefit if you remember that all this is allegorical."[55] Like Ficino, Erasmus believed that the philosophers state what is contained in a different manner in the holy scriptures. And, like Ficino, Erasmus recommended "the Platonists" the most highly: "Because in most of their ideas and in their very manner of speaking they come nearest to the beauty of the prophets and of the Gospels."[56] As Erasmus later explains, he is referring here to "the figurative language that [the Platonists] use, abounding in allegories, [which] very closely approaches the language of Scripture itself." Reading ancient philosophy and poetry in fact provides a kind of literary training for reading scripture allegorically. "Of course," Erasmus adds, whatever one finds in the Platonists should "be related to Christ."[57] It is not surprising, then, that among scriptural commentators, Erasmus recommended those who "go as far as possible beyond the literal meaning": "Origen, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine."[58] But Erasmus himself went even further, arguing that perhaps more was to be gained from reading myth allegorically than reading the Bible literally ("Immo fortasse plusculo fructu legetus poetica cum allegoria, quam narratio sacrorum librorum, si consistas in cortice").[59] As Jean Seznec has commented on this passage, "Neoplatonic exegesis, which had presented [Renaissance humanists] with hitherto undreamed-of possibilities of reconciliation between the Bible and mythology, had now

so obscured the distinction between the two that Christian dogma no lon-
ger seemed acceptable in anything but an allegorical sense."[60] Although
Erasmus did not go so far, in questioning the literal reading of Christian
doctrine, allegorical reading could ultimately point to a radical questioning
of the truth of Christian religion.

The explosive implications of these insights can be seen in the later lit-
erature of the Renaissance, where classical myth is no longer sublated by
Christian doctrine through allegorical reading but anticipates something
like the autonomy of the aesthetic artifact. To cite just three examples, we
see this in Marlowe's Faustus's conjuring of Mephistopheles and Helen
of Troy, and in Milton's catalogue of pagan gods in *Paradise Lost*. In the
first case, Marlowe prefaces the Latin spell that summons Mephistopheles
from hell with Faustus's own gorgeous poetry, thereby inviting the reader
or viewer to associate Faustus's magic with the magic of poetry, as well as
with theater's capacity to invent and bring to life figures such as Mephis-
topheles. Mephistopheles in turn encourages Faustus's tendency to sus-
pend Christian belief and treat scripture as mere literature, not least of all
by presenting the allegory of the seven deadly sins not as moral instruction
but as mere entertainment. If from one perspective, this allies aesthetic
pleasure with the devil, from another it shows skepticism about religion in
which the suspension of Christian belief morphs into literary experience.
As Graham Hammill has argued, "Faustus's blasphemy develops a sense
of language that completely reformulates theological belief." What makes
Doctor Faustus "tragical" according to Hammill is "less Faustus's renuncia-
tion of God and pact with Lucifer than the relation it establishes between
Faustus and the literary, a relation that makes the literary, as the site of
what Eliot called blasphemy, tragically inescapable."[61] In a less tragic vein,
Richard Halpern has commented on Faustus's summoning of Helen of
Troy: "For Marlowe, as for Faustus, the problem of the phantom Helen
is at one level the problem of classical culture as such, which appears as
a source of beauteous splendor and as a dangerous pagan delusion": "as
phantom or *eidolon*, [Faustus's Helen] lacks substance and, as a representa-
tive of a culture 'cancelled' by Christianity, she cannot serve as a reposi-
tory of transcendent values." But precisely because "Helen" does not al-
legorically represent transcendent value, she foregrounds Marlowe's own
invention. As Halpern writes, "The spell cast by her beauty is akin to that
produced by the work of art," including Marlowe's own.[62]

Milton might have been thinking of Marlowe when he associated his
devils with art in book 1 of *Paradise Lost*. Milton first wittily plays on the

Euhemerist critique by suggesting that the pagan gods were originally not important men but rather devils.[63] But in his metapoetic reflections about the building of Pandemonium and elsewhere, Milton also suggests, in David Quint's words, "that the imagination is a potential entry point for the diabolical into human experience": "Milton must summon the devils into poetic being in order to warn a reader who . . . is figured as unaware of them. But he runs the risk of fascinating the reader with that very poetic creation."[64] Although Quint does not make this argument, one implication of this analysis is that the representation of God is just as poetic or fictional as that of the devils. Another is that this elevation of poetry above theology or in place of theology is precisely what Milton intended. Gordon Teskey suggests as much when he places Milton at "the threshold of a post-theological world," and argues that his poetic power derives from "a rift at the center of his consciousness over the question of creation itself." Milton is "the last major poet in the European literary tradition for whom the act of creation is centered in God and the first in whom the act of creation begins to find its center in the human."[65] To use the terms I elaborated at the beginning of this essay, Milton dramatizes the transition (or at least the difficulty of maintaining the distinction) between poetic theology as divinely inspired poetry and as poetry that enacts the fiction of the divine. But even if we do not want to go so far, it seems clear that for Milton, as for Erasmus, literature itself is capable of being the vehicle of spiritual insight if read in the correct fashion, and this in turn suggests that what distinguishes scripture from other works is a habit of reading rather than any intrinsic features of the text.[66] In Milton's universe, hermeneutics constitutes one's relation to God: More radically, God himself might even be constituted through the activity of interpretation. In the process, the form-giving capacity of the human mind becomes the central preoccupation of both poet and reader.

Sanford Budick has argued that Kant's conception of aesthetic judgment and in particular of the analytic of the sublime was profoundly influenced by his reading of Milton. This reading was shaped by a generation of German Miltonists, for whom *Paradise Lost* was the supreme literary masterpiece of the Renaissance and the supreme instance of sublimity in poetry. But Kant was unique in linking Milton to his philosophical account of the aesthetic as purposeful purposelessness, that is, as a formal structure (rather than a specific content) that was ultimately internal to the mind. Kant, according to Budick, saw in Milton's poetry the transcendence of the mere copy view of art and the dramatization of a poetic process of

Nachfolge—a kind of imitation or emulation that achieves originality and in doing so exemplifies in formal terms the moral autonomy of the freely self-determining subject.[67]

Although Budick's analysis of Kant's indebtedness to Milton is unusual for its philosophical rigor, the insight at the heart of his analysis—his focus on the new centrality of form and the form-giving capacity of the human mind as keys to the emergence of the eighteenth-century discourse of aesthetics—is shared by some of the most important twentieth-century scholars of the Renaissance. As we've seen, early in the twentieth century, both Panofsky and Cassirer argued that whereas the Middle Ages appreciated the content of ancient culture, Renaissance artists attended to its formal qualities as well. And for both, this attention to form was the first step toward what Kant called aesthetic judgment. One of Panofsky's main arguments about the Renaissance prehistory of aesthetics, seconded by Cassirer, is that the period effected a divorce between the pulchrum and the bonum, the beautiful and the good, and thus liberated art from its medieval subordination to theology and metaphysics. At the same time, Renaissance artists strengthened the tie between the pulchrum and the verum, understood as the true representation of nature or nature's laws, thus anticipating the rule-governed conception of artistic genius prominent in Kant and eighteenth-century aesthetics more generally. For Panofsky, this divorce was achieved not simply by a focus on art as a craft but also by a new emphasis on the imitation of nature, as opposed to Platonic ideas.[68] Whereas Plato had been critical of art as mimesis at two removes of the eternal Ideas, early Renaissance art theorists such as Alberti conceived of the "idea" in Ciceronian terms as a mental construct, an idea of proportion or harmony, which was derived from nature and also gave the artist the confidence to imitate nature.[69] In Alberti, "the autonomy of the aesthetic experience . . . was recognized *de facto* even if not *de jure*."[70] Cassirer argued in a similar vein that for Leonardo, "the power of the mind, the power of artistic and of scientific genius does not reside in unfettered arbitrariness but in the ability to teach us to see and to know the 'object' in its truth, in its highest determination. Be it as artist or as thinker, the genius finds the necessity in nature." For Cassirer this development was part of a larger narrative about the emergence of the aesthetic: "Centuries elapsed before this principle was formulated in all its theoretical clarity, i.e. before the 'critique of judgment' could formulate the principle that genius is the gift of nature through which 'nature in the subject' gives the law to art. But the path towards this objective was now clearly indicated."[71]

I will quarrel in a moment with Cassirer's elision of the difference be-
tween the Renaissance idea of artistic creation, of giving form to the art
object, and Kant's idea of aesthetic judgment, which is famously indifferent
to the existence of the object.[72] But I also think that Panofsky and Cassirer
were right to emphasize the emergence of a new idea of aesthetic auton-
omy in this period. As I've argued in the preceding pages, one signature of
the new autonomy of the aesthetic artifact in the later Renaissance was the
transformation of allegory. No longer a poetic vehicle of divinely authored
theological truths, allegory became instead a sign of the eminently literary.
In *Paradise Lost*, for example, Milton employed allegory in the encounter
between Sin and Death, an episode that in the eighteenth century was
alternately praised for its sublimity and condemned for its obvious artifice.
Allegory here is not a form of poetic theology, revealing the hidden truths
of the cosmos under a veil of fiction. Instead, the allegory of Sin and Death
points self-referentially (Sin is described as "a sign") to the deadly abstrac-
tion of this rhetorical mode. At the same time, it celebrates the genial,
inventive power of the poet. Whether one sees the allegory of Sin and
Death as "very beautiful and well invented" or condemns it as unreal or
improbable in the context of epic (Addison did both), it foregrounds Mil-
ton's poetic achievement: In the first case, we note the sublimity of Milton's
imagination of Sin and Death; in the second case, we appreciate by contrast
"the realism" of the rest of the poem's "epic surface."[73] If from one per-
spective, then, the allegory of Sin and Death dramatizes the deadliness of a
certain kind of autonomous signification (Sin as sign) or in more orthodox
theological terms the diabolical nature of the aesthetic as a category and
an experience divorced from God, from another perspective Milton could
be said to be consciously of the devil's party, dramatizing his own aesthetic
powers of invention.[74] Here we have moved entirely from one pole of al-
legory (allegory as a structure of the cosmos) to the other (allegory as the
human invention of forms that would otherwise be unimaginable).

If we now return to early twentieth-century genealogies of the aesthetic,
we can see that Panofsky and Cassirer were right to treat the Renaissance
preoccupation with form as an important moment in the history of aesthet-
ics. But, as the preceding pages have shown, what Milton and others meant
by form was not the purposive purposelessness of Kant's free beauty, which
the judging subject finds in (that is, ascribes to) the autonomous aesthetic
artifact. Nor was form understood in Kantian terms as a symbol of the
self-legislating subject who gives the moral law to himself. Instead, Re-
naissance artists from Alberti to Milton celebrated the actual form-giving

capacity of the artist, while creating works of art whose beauty Kant would have described as "dependent." This is a beauty that does not produce disinterested contemplation and is instead inseparable from the emotions and concepts through which we make sense of our experience, including ethical concepts and ideas of truth.[75] As M. H. Abrams recognized long ago, form for these Renaissance authors was a matter of construction more than aesthetic contemplation, at least in Kant's sense of the term. Kant's identification of the experience of form with disinterested contemplation thus represented a fundamental shift away from the powerful insights of Renaissance artists into their own ability not simply to imitate, but to create new forms and new worlds.[76]

<div align="center">NOTES</div>

1. Stephen Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 357.

2. For the former, see, for example, Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), and Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text*: *Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); for the latter, see an older generation of scholars such as Jean Seznec and Erwin Panofsky, discussed below. Ernst Cassirer, though not discussing only the history of allegorical interpretation, also reads the Renaissance as anticipating Kant's insights in *The Critique of Judgment*.

3. For an argument that the Renaissance did not yet have a full-blown concept of aesthetics, see Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts," in *Renaissance Thought and the Arts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 163–228.

4. On the failure of the humanist pedagogical project in poetry, see Jeff Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). For one articulation of the aesthetic conception of literature in the Renaissance, see Lodovico Castelvetro's commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics*. For an argument about the way that early modern political thought and moral philosophy anticipate certain aspects of the Kantian aesthetic, see Howard Caygill, *Art of Judgement* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989). And for an argument in some ways close to the one I elaborate here, see M. H. Abrams, who charts the shift from what he calls a construction conception of art in the Renaissance to a focus on contemplation (by the viewer or reader) in eighteenth-century aesthetics in "From Addison to Kant: Modern Aesthetics and Exemplary Art," in his *Doing Things with Texts* (New York: Norton, 1989).

5. See Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, trans. Mario Domandi (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963), 51, 67, 95; and Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1960), chap. 1. I return to Cassirer and Panofsky at the end of this essay.

6. Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1972), 6.6.239 and 6.6.237.

7. Although Plato was critical of myth as mimesis, he reintroduced myth in his own work in the form of the allegory of the cave. Although—or precisely because—Plato's myth was an invented myth, his allegorizing gesture proved to be prophetic of later recuperations of Greek and Roman myth. That is, it was later used by Renaissance Neoplatonists to argue that Plato himself wrote allegorically, just as the poets did.

8. Luc Brisson, *How Philosophers Saved Myths: Allegorical Interpretation and Classical Mythology*, trans. Catherine Tihanyi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 30.

9. See Peter T. Struck, *Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Limits of Their Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), chap. 1. Struck argues that ancient theories of the symbol, with their emphasis on the enigmatic or allegorical reading of texts, anticipate modern concerns with "the ontological linkage between signs and their referents, the notion that language is autonomous and creates a world rather than passively labeling it, and the view of the poet as a solitary genius, attuned to the hidden truths of the cosmic order" (13). One of Struck's main points is that, unlike Romantic theory, ancient theory did not distinguish between symbol and allegory. Another is that allegory in antiquity was a practice of reading, not of writing.

10. See Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*, trans. Barbara F. Sessions (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 269, on the preservation of myth in the Renaissance.

11. See Brisson, *How Philosophers Saved Myths*, 1.

12. On Euhemerus as "the atheist," see ibid., 48.

13. Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods*, trans. Horace C. P. McGregor (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1972), 86.

14. Ibid., 87.

15. Ibid., 112–13.

16. Ibid., 152.

17. Ibid., 233.

18. Ibid., 218.

19. Etienne Gilson, "Poésie et vérité dans la *Genealogia* de Boccace," in *Studi sul Boccaccio*, vol. 2, ed. Vittorio Branca (Florence: Sansoni, 1964), 259.

20. Werner Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), 49.

21. See Thomas Aquinas's commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* (1 *Sent.*, *prologue* 1, 5c and *ad tertium*), in which Aquinas sees metaphor as "common to both poetry and theology," a position he refines in the *Summa Theologica* (I, 1, 9 ad 1). E. H. Curtius gives the references to Aquinas and provides an account of the medieval debate about poetic theology, specifically about whether poetry can be conceived of as a form of theology or must instead be distinguished from Christian theology, in *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 217. In "Allegory in Christian Late Antiquity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Denys Turner argues that the distinction between theological and poetic allegory advanced by Aquinas, Nicholas of Lyra, and Hugh of Saint Victor was designed "to liberate theological allegory from its confusions with the literary," but "an untended consequence was in turn to liberate the literary possibilities of allegory from their confusion with the theological" (82). For an account of poetic theology in the Renaissance, see Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 vols. (London: Constable, 1970), 2:683–722.

22. See Turner, "Allegory in Christian Late Antiquity," 79.

23. Ibid., 80.

24. In "Figura," trans. Ralph Manheim in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), Erich Auerbach described figura as "allegorical in the widest sense," but different from the usual understanding of allegory in "the historicity of both sign and signified" (54). This kind of relation introduces a temporal dimension into allegory, one that would provide a model for negotiating the vast temporal and moral difference between pagan and Christian texts in the Renaissance. Just as the Old Testament prefigures events in the New, so it would be argued pagan myth prefigures the truths of Christianity.

25. See Albert R. Ascoli, "Dante and Allegory," in *Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, 135; and *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Thus Dante would be one important medieval author who anticipates the modern notion of literature that I am locating primarily in the Renaissance.

26. Copeland and Struck, introduction to *Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, 5.

27. Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, 2:685.

28. Instead of depicting Hercules anachronistically clothed in medieval doublet and hose, Renaissance painters and sculptors depicted Hercules in

ancient Greek dress. The appreciation of classical form was thus inseparable from a new perception of the difference in historical periods, a new historical self-consciousness. Formalism and historicism, so often thought to be opposed, were in this case not antithetical but mutually enabling. Historicism, that is, was not a cause of skepticism, nor did it imply a whiggish philosophy of history. Instead, it signified a newly confident appreciation of the objective achievements of the past. In addition to fostering a new historical self-consciousness, the enlivening encounter with classical forms also produced a new epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics. See Karl Borinski, *Die Weltwiedergeburtsidee in den neueren Zeiten, I: Der Streit um die Renaissance und die Enstehungsgeschichte der historischen Beziehungsbegriffe Renaissance und Mittelalter* (Bayreuth: Bayrische Academie der Wissenschaften, 1919), cited by Cassirer, *Individual and Cosmos*, 6, 159–60; Seznec, *Survival of the Pagan Gods*; Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, 84, 112, 177.

29. See Seznec, *Survival of the Pagan Gods*; and for an argument that Seznec exaggerates the continuities between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance allegorical interpretations of the pagan gods, see Eugenio Garin, "Le favole antiche," in *Medioevo e rinascimento: Studi e ricerche* (Bari: Laterza, 1973), 63–84.

30. See Brisson, *How Philosophers Saved Myths*, 113. Brisson is talking about Byzantine Christianity; cf. also Gilson, "Poésie et vérité."

31. Coluccio Salutati, *De laboribus herculis*, book 2, cited in Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, 2:697. See also Ronald Witt, *Hercules at the Crossroads: The Life, Works, and Thought of Coluccio Salutati* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1983), 212–26, 405–9.

32. Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, 2:690. The widespread Renaissance interest in what D. P. Walker has called "ancient theology," that is, the compatibility of what were believed to be ancient Orphic, Hermetic, and Neoplatonic texts with Christian doctrine, is relevant here. See Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1972). I discuss Neoplatonism below.

33. Giovanni Boccaccio, *On Poetry*, trans. Charles Osgood (New York: Macmillan Press, 1956), 12.

34. Ibid., 48–49.

35. Ibid., 6.

36. Ibid., 121–23.

37. See Cicero, *De natura deorum*, 2.72; Augustine, *Civitate Dei*, 10.3, 12.24.

38. Boccaccio, *On Poetry*, 128. For an excellent reading of Boccaccio's *Genealogia*, see Ronald Levao, *Renaissance Minds and Their Fictions* (Berkeley:

University of California Press, 1985), 111–16. Levao stresses "the ambiguity latent within the poet's originating *inventio*: the twilight boundary between objective discovery and projection; allegory as it is fashioned in the *Genealogy* becomes as much a sign of the imagination at play as a grounded justification of that play" (116).

39. Boccaccio, *On Poetry*. 122.

40. See Gilson, "Poésie et verité."

41. Seznec, *Survival of the Pagan Gods*, 85. On Neoplatonism, see also Erwin Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, trans. Joseph J. S. Peake (New York: Icon, 1968), and E. H. Gombrich, *Symbolic Images: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance II* (New York: Phaidon, 1978), esp. 150–91.

42. C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 45.

43. See Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, trans. Michael J. B. Allen, ed. Michael Allen and James Hankins, 6 vols. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001–6), 3.236 and 242. on the soul as the "copula mundi." I cite the *Platonic Theology* by book number and page.

44. Seznec, *Survival of the Pagan Gods*, 96. Significantly, Plotinus rejected Plato's notion that art imitates the Ideas at two removes, arguing instead that the artist has direct access to the Ideas. See his *Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Faber and Faber, 1926), 5.8.1.

45. Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Platonic Academy in Florence," in *Renaissance Thought II: Papers on Humanism and the Arts* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 99. See also Cassirer, *Individual and Cosmos*, 71, on how Ficino's concept of religion leads to increased tolerance toward different forms of religion.

46. In his introduction to Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Phaedrus* i n *Commentaries on Plato*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Michael J. B. Allen, I Tatti Renaissance Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), Allen writes, "As the first great poem by Plato—whom Ficino believed to be the last and greatest of the *prisci theologi* . . . the *Phaedrus* establishes poetry as the philosophic mode par excellence and the poetical style as the authentically Platonic style" (12). See also the introduction to Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, 1:xii: Ficino used the term "prisci theologi"; Pico had planned to write a "poetic theology."

47. Ficino calls God the "artifex omnium" in the epistolary introduction to *Platonic Theology* that he wrote for Lorenzo de' Medici, which is included in volume 6 of the I Tatti edition, here 244. On this dimension of Ficino's argument, see André Chastel, *Marsile Ficin et l'art* (Geneva: Droz, 1954); Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, 2:461–504; and E. N. Tigerstedt, "The Poet as Creator: Origins of a Metaphor," *Comparative Literature Studies* 5 (1968): 455–88, esp. 471–75. Tigerstedt argues that Landino's comparison of the poet to God the creator was fundamentally influenced by Ficino's concep-

tion of man as "a semi-creator," an intermediary between the world and God (475). Ernst Cassirer also emphasizes this aspect of Ficino in *Individual and the Cosmos*: "Ultimately, the beauty of the sensible world does not derive from itself; rather, it is founded in the fact that it becomes, in a sense, the medium *through which* the free creative force of man acts and becomes conscious of itself. Seen in this light, however, art no longer lies outside the province of religion but rather becomes a moment of the religious process itself" (67). "In [its] religious justification of the world, . . . the Florentine Academy always returns to the miracle of beauty, to the miracle of artistic form and of artistic creation. And upon this miracle it founds its theodicy" (63), citing *Platonic Theology*, 10.5; "The theodicy of the world given by Ficino in his doctrine of Eros had, at the same time, become the true theodicy of art" (135). For Ficino, however, philosophy was always a *pia philosophia* rather than an independent method of investigation, as was the case for Cusa (61).

48. Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, 14.248.

49. Ibid., 13.175.

50. Ibid., 14.305–7.

51. Cassirer, *Individual and Cosmos*, 63.

52. Ibid., 67.

53. Ibid., 67; see also 160–61.

54. Ibid., 143.

55. Erasmus, *The Enchiridion of Erasmus*, trans. and ed. Raymond Himelick (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), 51. See especially chapter 14 for Erasmus's Neoplatonic language about the relationship between body and soul, matter and spirit.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid., 53.

59. Ibid., 105.

60. Seznec, *Survival of the Pagan Gods*, 99; the Erasmus example is from Seznec.

61. Graham Hammill, *Sexuality and Form: Caravaggio, Marlowe, and Bacon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 97.

62. Richard Halpern, "Marlowe's Theater of Night: *Doctor Faustus* and Capital," *ELH* 71, no. 2 (2004): 487, 488, 489. In this essay Halpern is not particularly interested in arguing that Marlowe is criticizing theology, but I think this is one of the implications of his argument.

63. In "Milton's Book of Numbers: Book 1 of *Paradise Lost* and Its Catalogue," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 13, no. 3 (2007): 528–49, David Quint traces this line of argument to Augustine in *The City of God* 8.24. See 546.

64. Ibid.

65. Gordon Teskey, *Delirious Milton: The Fate of the Poet in Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 5, 29.

66. I've made this argument in relation to *Paradise Regain'd* in "Job's Complaint in *Paradise Regain'd*," *ELH* 76, no. 3 (2009): 625–60.

67. Sanford Budick, *Kant and Milton* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010). Kant "viewed the phenomenon of exemplary genius as the surest indication of the universal human potential for freedom, originality, individuality, and even moral feeling" (15). On *Nachfolge*, which Budick translates not as "following" but as "succession," see p. 3.

68. Panofsky, *Idea*, 47. See also Halliwell, *Aesthetics of Mimesis*, on the Renaissance recovery of the Aristotelian tradition of mimesis and the diverse ways in which the imitation of nature was construed by Renaissance artists and theorists.

69. Panofsky, *Idea*, 50, 65.

70. Ibid., 55. In the later Renaissance, by contrast, Panofsky argued, Neoplatonism undermined this achievement by reverting to a concept of the idea as transcendental and a priori, and insisting on providing a metaphysical justification of beauty. See ibid., 56, 93.

71. Cassirer, *Individual and Cosmos*, 164.

72. See Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, §2. On this indifference to the object, see the excellent discussion of Kant in Jonathan Loesberg, *A Return to Aesthetics: Autonomy, Indifference, Postmodernism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), chap. 2.

73. Steven Knapp, *Personification and the Sublime: Milton to Coleridge* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 56, quoting Addison's appreciation of the allegory and paraphrasing Addison's criticism of its improbability in the context of the epic.

74. On Sin and Death as in part an allegorical critique of the autonomy of the aesthetic, see my earlier essay, "Allegory and the Sublime in *Paradise Lost*," in *Milton*, ed. Annabel Patterson (London: Longman, 1992), 185–201.

75. See Halliwell, *Aesthetics of Mimesis*, 10, on the difference between free and dependent beauty in Kant. Kant discusses dependent aesthetic judgments in *The Critique of Judgment*, §16.

76. See M. H. Abrams, "From Addison to Kant," on the shift from a construction model of art to a contemplation model, and on the idea of a heterocosm. On the Renaissance conception of art as a heterocosm, see also Harry Berger Jr., *Second World and Green World: Studies in Renaissance Fiction-Making* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).