

CULTURAL GENEALOGY

An Essay on Early Modern Myth

RAPHAEL FALCO



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Cultural Genealogy explores the popularization in the Renaissance of the still pervasive myth that later cultures are the hereditary descendants of ancient or older cultures. The core of this myth is the widespread belief that a numinous charismatic power can be passed down unchanged, and in concrete forms, from earlier eras. Raphael Falco shows that such a process of descent is an impossible illusion in a knowledge-based culture. Anachronistic adoption of past values can only occur when these values are adapted and assimilated to the target culture. Without such transcultural adaptation, ancient values would appear as alien artifacts rather than as eternal truths.

Scholars have long acknowledged the Renaissance borrowings from classical antiquity, but most studies of *translatio studii* or *translatio imperii* tacitly accept the early modern myth that there was a genuine translation of Greek and Roman cultural values from the ancient world to the “modern.” But as Falco demonstrates, this is patently not the case. The mastering of ancient languages and the rediscovery of lost texts has masked the fact that surprisingly little of ancient religious, ethical, or political ideology was retained – so little that it is crucial to ask why these myths of transcultural descent have not been recognized and interrogated. Through examples ranging from Petrarch to Columbus, Maffeo Vegio to the Habsburgs, Falco shows how the new *technē* of systematic genealogy facilitated the process of “remythicizing” the ancient authorities, utterly transforming Greek and Roman values and reforging them in the mold of contemporary needs.

Chiefly a study of intellectual culture, *Cultural Genealogy* has ramifications reaching into all levels of society, both early modern and later.

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For Ani and Christoph

Credo quia absurdum.

Tertullian, quoted in Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*

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Introduction

In an essay called “Thinking Beyond Spengler,” Franz Borkenau, the German polymath and sometime beneficiary of Frankfurt School generosity, issued a warning to cultural historians. Quoting Spinoza’s dictum, *Omnis determinatio est negatio* (Every definition is also an exclusion), Borkenau said that “the cycles of the great high cultures are characterized by a singular evolution of style that almost might be seen as logical.” “For style,” he added, “whether one speaks of the style of clothing or of art . . . of the ‘style’ of government and economic life or – almost blasphemously – of the style of religion, is necessarily formed by acts of positing, defining, limiting, and excluding.”¹

This book, meant as an extended essay, focuses on one such period of positing, defining, limiting, and excluding, and particularly on the “style” that stands as evidence of those acts. I have called this book *Cultural Genealogy: An Essay on Early Modern Myth*. My subtitle indicates this book’s center of gravity, but the myth I discuss inevitably extends beyond the early modern period. From time to time, I allow myself to roam outside even the admittedly forgiving edges of that historical boundary. “Cultural genealogy” is, simply, the Western idea that later intellectual cultures are the hereditary descendants of prior intellectual cultures.² As the following chapters show, it can be at one time a living myth, a fiction, a practice, a conviction, and an institution, and we find the manifest presence of cultural genealogy in such diverse areas as poetry, ideas of nationhood, ethnic history, and religion.

Familiar concepts such as *translatio imperii* and *translatio studii* refer optimistically to a process of agency, the choosing and reintegration of the ideals and valued practices of earlier cultures. But older, traditional scholarship on *translatio imperii studii* is moribund, in large measure because it neglects to account for the massive distortions inherent in the concept of *translatio*. More recent scholars have tried, if not wholly to correct, then at least to acknowledge this neglect.

Taking Thomas Greene’s *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (Yale 1982) and Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine’s *From Humanism to the Humanities* (Harvard 1986) as *termini ad quo*, it is possible to trace renewed interest in how the intellectual past was transmitted, and how the notion of genealogy contributed to that transmission. Such studies as Ronald Witt’s *In the Footsteps of the Ancients* (Brill 2003) and his *The Two Latin Cultures and*

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the Foundation of Renaissance Humanism in Medieval Italy (Cambridge 2012), along with Heather James's *Shakespeare's Troy: Drama, Politics, and the Translation of Empire* (Cambridge 1997), extend the research into cultural descent and intellectual charisma. Roberto Bizzocchi, in his *Genealogie incredibili: Scritti di storia nell'Europa moderna* (Bologna 1995), meticulously outlines the value of "incredible" genealogical imposture in fabricating the social and civic foundations of modern Europe, while Marie Tanner, in *The Last Descendant of Aeneas: The Hapsburgs and the Mythic Image of the Emperor* (Yale 1993), explores how myth and genealogy are inextricably woven in all legitimizing descent narratives. Similarly, in her inspiring scholarship, Christiane Klapisch-Zuber has repeatedly examined the "bizarre population" of family trees, and has asserted in such works as *L'Ombre des Ancêtres: Essai sur L'Imaginaire Médiéval de la Parenté* (Paris 2000) that the imaginary features of medieval genealogy are far more important than logical genealogical diagrams.

This is an invaluable observation in regard to my own work, and provides strong evidence of the need to re-interrogate the *grand récit* of cultural genealogy in the West. Klapisch-Zuber offers examples of all manner of family trees in *L'Arbres des Familles* (Paris 2003), from the tree of Jesse to "Les Branches des Épouses" to "L'Arbre des Aristocraties Coloniales," all of which emphasize the fantasy of charismatic descent as a means of obtaining, among other things, political power, sexual legitimacy, or divine authority. The exiguousness of these genealogical claims and their impossible translation from civilization to civilization underscores the need for scholarship to fill the gap I mentioned earlier – that is, to identify and examine the myth of transcultural descent. Among many other topics and authors, I've been spurred on particularly by the new research in Byzantine studies represented by, inter alia, Judith Herrin (*Margins and Metropolis*, Princeton 2013) and Christopher Kelly (*Ruling the Later Roman Empire*, Harvard 2004).

Transcultural descent and cultural transmission notwithstanding, the concept of *imitatio*, a familiar one from literary humanism, should probably replace that of *translatio* as the defining "habitus" of the intellectual epoch.³ *Imitatio* better indicates the transformations that cultural values undergo when zeal for learning (*studium*) and for authority/political order (*imperium*) are "translated" from one time period to another. Preferable terms would be *imitatio culturae* and *imitatio potentiae*. Because "imitation" implies personal identification and therefore interest (rather than detachment), these terms more accurately reflect the manifest fiction of translatability found in Renaissance myths of cultural descent and cultural transmission.

Let me emphasize, however, that *Cultural Genealogy* isn't an attempt to deny the obvious in regard to the transmission of cultural souvenirs, although even such apparently static retrievals as literary genres and "dead" languages contain more distortion than meets the eye. Nor is the book an effort to conduct an empirical survey of practices, *imagines*, and values that survived their so-called translation relatively unscathed. To go down this road leads unavoidably to pettiness, and to not a few surprises in regard to selective inheritance. As much was abandoned for

the expediency of stylizing culture as was said to be retrieved. As Andrea Giardina puts it, in a discussion of late antiquity that has resonance with early modern development, “it is necessary to . . . note that a given phenomenon cannot be branded a continuity or discontinuity without a prior description of the structure (or structures) to which the phenomenon itself belongs.”⁴ The continuities and discontinuities humanism has propagated tended to reinvent prior structures, to aestheticize the past in a way that simultaneously petrified it and made its charismatic authority accessible as a source of transcultural descent. It is tempting to think of this process as a form of allegory, what Gordon Teskey describes as “the struggle between a represented conceptual order and a representing narrative action, between static ideas and dynamic agents.”⁵ Teskey’s astute and complex analysis of the forces that produced Renaissance allegory, which he defines as “a literary form that situates the numinous outside the order of signs, as absolute meaning,” has powerful resonance for cultural genealogy in its aestheticization of the past and its development of a descent narrative.⁶ Despite this narrative content, however, cultural genealogy should not be reduced to a rhetorical trope or literary category. The struggle between stasis and dynamism that Teskey identifies certainly mirrors the manipulation of entropy-production that I will discuss later in this book, and I don’t wish to misconstrue or misapply his terms (which he confines to literary-critical observation). But the living myth of transcultural descent depends, if not on the numinous per se, then on the charisma of blood descent reinvested with meaning patently within the order of signs.

In any case, allegory or aestheticization notwithstanding, I concede here, at the outset of this book, that we can find isolated examples of cultural transmission and cultural revival where the important characteristics of the transmitted item or idea remain intact. But these examples are very rare, much more so than scholars have acknowledged. And there’s more at stake than merely a question of degree. At stake is perception itself – or perhaps I should say misperception – and its early modern origins. The discourse of transcultural descent, and our own perception of the texts we study, depend on the chauvinistic early modern perception of their supposedly unique relationship to the epistemological, genealogical, linguistic, and literary character of past cultures. This discourse is a fully integrated (and integral) element of a living myth that governed virtually all experience of historical authority and cultural authenticity in the Renaissance. And, to a certain extent, this same myth – living or dead – governs our contemporary understanding of the past.

Take, for example, Borkenau’s terminology quoted in the first paragraph. The language itself seems to be an apparently unaware inheritor of the myth of cultural genealogy. Phrases like “cycles of high culture,” “styles of religion,” even the word “evolution,” all reflect an embedded belief in a descent relationship between cultures. The details of this relationship and the embeddedness – or imbrication – of the style of those who propagated it I will leave to the following chapters. At this point it’s enough to note that, like most cultural historians, Borkenau hedges his bets on the subject of cultural change. He sees the “great high cultures” as “characterized by a singular evolution of style that *almost* might

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be seen as logical” (emphasis added). That “almost” is exactly right. There is no actual logic to the evolution of style in cultural production, despite the fact that a particular style often comes to represent a particular epoch. But there is invariably the appearance and persuasion of logical evolution.

The logic of myth

Cultural genealogy, from its most outlandish ethnic claims to its most “logical” evolutionary ones, is an ongoing, if often puzzling, process. Its origins as a prominent epistemological imperative can be traced to the early modern period and especially to the energetic remythicizations by fourteenth- and fifteenth-century intellectuals in their distortions of ancient Greek and Roman culture. Like the alphabet developed at that time and the school curriculum that grew from the *studia humanitatis*, the myth of cultural descent the humanists established is still with us today, albeit sometimes in watered-down, domesticated terms (but not always so watered-down, as the belief in ethnic “purity” demonstrates).⁷

In a book titled – provocatively for a study of cultural genealogy – *We Have Never Been Modern*, Bruno Latour makes a complicated assessment of the pitfalls of mixing purity and translation (a term in which he merges “hybrids” and “networks”):

So long as we consider these two practices of translation and purification separately, we are truly modern – that is, we willingly subscribe to the critical project, even though that project is developed only through the proliferation of hybrids down below. As soon as we direct our attention simultaneously to the work of purification and the work of hybridization, we immediately stop being wholly modern, and our future begins to change. At the same time we stop having been modern, because we become retrospectively aware that the two sets of practices have always already been at work in the historical period that is ending. Our past begins to change.⁸

“Translation,” “purification,” and “hybridization” are watchwords of early modernization. Genealogy tended to be the method by which authors purified themselves, linking their own present to an idealized, even aestheticized, past in the name of “modern” intellectual endeavor. The charismatic or numinous authority of that genealogical link provided authenticity to virtually all humanist thought and practice. Although they would not have thought themselves engaged in what Latour calls the “work of hybridization,” the ubiquitous syncretism found in Renaissance philosophy, theology, and the arts reflects the humanists’ consciousness of the hybrid nature of their ideas. Paradoxically, their syncretism had the effect in their imaginations of purifying, rather than muddying, those ideas – just as affixing their culture to an ancient and decidedly alien culture purified, rather than confused, the transcultural descent they sought. I’m not sure, but I think Latour is suggesting that the sudden awareness of the simultaneity of practicing purification and hybridization bursts the delusion of being modern, and, as

a result, the past begins ineluctably to change. But this characterization, if I've got it right, doesn't fit early modern humanist culture. Humanist intellectuals were conscious of, and sensitive to, the liminal status they maintained between antiquity and the present, and they embraced their ability to manage their powers of retrospective re-creation. Above all, they wanted the past to change, and deliberately fostered its mutability, thereby creating the myth of their transcultural inheritance.

Humanist intellectuals engaged in a systematic practice of remythification that involved the radical alienation of ancient authority from its original representations. Speaking of the practice of Christian typology, Julia Lupton notes that "'classical culture' rather than being an accurate picture of pagan religion or society, becomes the dialectical construction of a Christian humanism that synthesizes the Greek ideal of truth immanent in beauty with its own doctrine of the Incarnation, leaving out anything that does not predict this reconciliation."⁹ While the humanists certainly left out a great deal from their "dialectical reconstruction," they usually did less synthesizing than they're given credit for. They tended more toward a scorched-earth policy of emptying out old myths and reinvesting them with new meaning. My chief aim in this book will be to show how those intellectuals accomplished what they did. Their method alone is worth writing about: it came to embody a pedagogical and religious philosophy we still carry with us.

It is not an exaggeration to conclude that cultural genealogy has had an astonishing effect on our comprehension of the major intellectual institutions of the Renaissance: poetry, poetic theory, historical writing, Protestantism, philosophy, and national identity. It also provided a model of discursive conduct that is now ingrained in Western tradition. For the humanist intellectuals, the act of remythification involved a violent alienation of ancient authority from its mythical representations and a re-mythifying of that authority in a new and newly powerful form. Consequently we find a constellation of expropriation, rationalization, and re-enchantment in every remythification. And in every reforged genealogy we can identify exquisitely calibrated transformations of charismatic authority balanced against a freshly contextualized past myth.

There is more to this reforging than meets the eye. Clearly, the rationalization and re-enchantment of past myths would result in the production of a new set of myths. But the acceptance of those newly expropriated myths, their genuine remythification in a present context, might still cause doubt if the fact of the myth were separate from its production. Cultural genealogy, and in particular the practitioners of cultural genealogical discourse, solved this problem. The *production* of the myth – a living myth – came to constitute the discourse itself, and the "style" (in Borkenau's word) of the discourse became the content of our cultural inheritance.

Cultural Genealogy approaches the social and aesthetic ramifications of this living myth by challenging a range of misconceptions surrounding cultural transmission. I would like to believe that this book meets a current need. Much recent scholarship on the early modern period has focused on transcultural

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influences, interchanges between empires, transoceanic exploitation, and linguistic intermingling. Yet, despite flourishing interest in cultural mobility, ethnic hybridity, and other forms of *métissage*, no study has explored the myth of cultural genealogy. This is an unfortunate neglect because the institution of cultural genealogy in the early modern period is a prominent example of hybridity. It reflects a deliberate and self-conscious effort among humanists to affix their civilization onto another – an impossible Other – literally affiliating their intellectual sphere with the literature, art, philosophy, politics, and even religious character of a lost past. Although scholars have acknowledged transcultural descent as a backdrop to many intellectual achievements of the Renaissance, they have largely left the process of mythicization unexamined. Yet the myth of cultural genealogy often accompanied and served to legitimize the manufactured shift from the premodern to the modern, a notorious and much-contested site of hybridization in Western intellectual history. Fictions of transcultural descent multiplied in tandem with the growth of other cultural phenomena, adding to such overlapping realities as cross-oceanic trade, linguistic plurality, pilgrimage, and colonization the charismatic element of ancient *auctoritas*, an element whose value was inestimable at the time and that continues to undergird many of our epistemological truths today.

In the introduction to a recent volume titled *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*, Stephen Greenblatt makes the observation that “when it comes to the past, the enterprise of tracking the restless and often unpredictable movements of texts, ideas, and whole cultures is still at a very early stage.”¹⁰ I find this an astute and encouraging remark as it affects this book, because, as Greenblatt acknowledges, there are already “two powerful traditional models for understanding cultural mobility”:

The first is the account that historians and ideologues developed for describing the *translatio imperii*, the “translation” of power and authority from the Persians to the Greeks, from Greece to Rome, and then from imperial Rome to a succession of ambitious regimes in nascent nation states. The second is the account that theologians developed for describing the ways Christianity “fulfilled” the Hebrew Scriptures and hence transformed the Torah into the “Old Testament.” Each model possesses rich resources for grasping the mechanisms through which one cultural system is taken over or reshaped by another.¹¹

This paragraph conflates past and current deployment, which is confusing. But, to be clear, my aim in this book is to reckon with the “mechanisms” themselves, and genealogy in particular, as means “through which one cultural system is taken over or reshaped by another.” Cultures can’t be taken over in a genealogical medium, at least not materially, but they are inevitably reshaped and given powerful figurative authority. It may be, as Greenblatt says, that the traditional models offer rich resources “for understanding cultural mobility,” but I find that they tend to neglect the crucial importance of remythicization for analyzing all forms of

cultural mobility, especially during the seismic upheavals of the early modern period. Because of this neglect, the traditional models have by and large failed to record the distortions and revaluations inherent in the process of transcultural descent.

Greenblatt also faults the traditional analytic tools, if with broader aims and for somewhat cryptic reasons. Still, his vehemence has a tonic effect:

To write convincing and accurate cultural analyses – not only of the troubled present but of centuries past – requires, to paraphrase *Hamlet*, more a chronicle of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts than a story of inevitable progress from traceable origins.¹²

It is precisely the notion of “inevitable progress from traceable origins” that is under interrogation in this book. Greenblatt goes on to emphasize that it is “disruptive forces” that shape history and “not a rooted sense of cultural legitimacy.” True, but here I would add that the image, or illusion, of a rooted sense of legitimacy can sometimes be as important as those myriad disruptive forces in shaping culture. Maybe Greenblatt is implying this when he concludes that “we need to account for the persistence, over long time periods and in the face of radical disruption, of cultural identities for which substantial numbers of people are willing to make sacrifices, including life itself.”

There’s no simple way of explaining the persistence of cultural identities and it would be facile to suggest that any one factor should be singled out. But it’s nonetheless extraordinary to note how often persistent cultural identities are accompanied by some form of cultural genealogy – accompanied, reconfigured for successive generations, and preserved against all rationality. Ordinary genealogical myth provides the ideal medium for sustaining legitimacy over long time periods, as in families. Transcultural genealogy goes even further. It has the ability to confront disruptive social forces, and even mask certain forms of hybridity when purity is the order of the day. But it does so spuriously – spuriously, yet with bafflingly enduring success in many cases.

To begin, however, we should recognize that cultural genealogy is a lie – a lie of descent. The process of cultural genealogy is complex and, undeniably, valuable ideals are passed down from the past, apparently with a precise admixture of agency and genealogical inheritance. But we should proceed here with caution. As I discuss later, whether we term the process *translatio studii* or *inventio*, we must acknowledge that one cannot really transfer or translate values without wresting them violently from their time. All values are local – this is a cornerstone of my argument – all values are local, bound by the limits of the social sphere: customs, religion, education, and trade. Anachronistic adoption of past values can occur *only* through a myth of transcultural assimilation. Without the myth, without a charismatically fostered lie of descent that breaks the boundaries of time, ancient values would appear in the present as alien artifacts rather than as eternal truths. The point is this: the value of transferred ideas does not precede their transmission. On the contrary, the myth of transmissibility acts as the means

of forming those ideas. Consequently, before we can judge the effects on our epistemology stemming from the lie of descent, we have to establish the means by which individual, family-oriented devices were translated to the public sphere. In other words, we have to find out how ordinary genealogy, warts and all, became cultural genealogy.

The technology of blood

One might protest that I am being too literal in my definition of genealogy and thereby limiting the natural elasticity of the term. Perhaps, instead, genealogy should be understood as a form of evolution, a constant but patently *unconscious* transformation (or mutation) of an original essence that would be unlike the active digestive process associated with *imitatio* but that would produce a similar result across generations. This would be a reasonable protest and an interesting argument. But early modern writers simply didn't make such an argument, in all likelihood because of the sanctity of genealogical bloodlines in the cultural imagination, from the ruling classes down through the different castes. As genealogical technique became increasingly authoritative, blood descent gained an architectural solidity, as Figure I.1 shows.

This is not to say blood superiority didn't hold sway long before scientific genealogy or fold-out pyramidal charts like the one here shown. On the contrary, as Hanan Yoran puts it, "what may be termed 'medieval aristocratic ideology' could be considered as the zero-degree of traditional premodern political thought. The central social and political categories of aristocratic ideology were those of the nobles who ruled and the commoners who obeyed."¹³ And, one might add, they obeyed – undoubtedly with varying degrees of bitterness – because they accepted the rights of consanguinity. But the advent of a more scientific genealogy, of a *technology* of descent, infused this premodern "aristocratic ideology" with the authority of modernization and progress.

The implicit message of the new genealogical techniques was a mixed one, however, a seedbed for misprision. Despite the scientific surface of the new genealogical techniques, the message was, and could only be, blood power itself. The technology served as an ameliorating re-historicizing of supposedly natural blood hierarchies – or, more accurately, a remythicization of the indissoluble bond between consanguinity and power. Because this notion predated both the medieval and early modern periods, saturating both sacred and secular texts, it remained exempt from the shifting values of humanist ideology. Yoran argues that humanist discourse contradicted scholastic philosophy by rejecting its transcendental foundations, specifically, "that behind phenomenal reality there lies an intelligible and unchangeable substance." He adds that "the rejection of this assumption by the humanists, and consequent substitution of theological and metaphysical categories by historical and concrete ones, provided the theoretical basis for the perception of historical changes and of humans – active humans – as the agents of these changes."¹⁴ This is an important distinction, and if historical and concrete categories in fact replaced metaphysical ones, as Yoran claims – which isn't

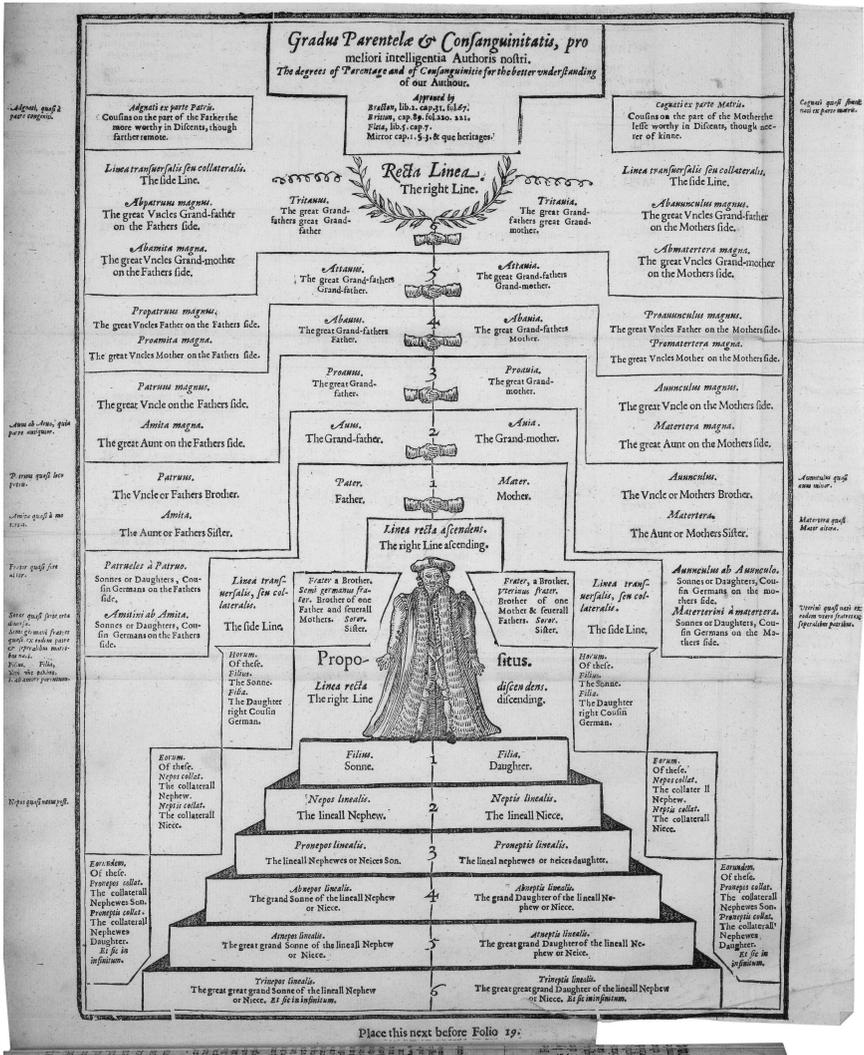


Figure 1.1 Fold-out genealogical chart: *Parentelae et Consanguinitatis*. By permission of the Folger Library.

universally the case in my view – such a substitution patently did not occur in the realm of genealogy. Humanists certainly saw themselves as agents of historical change, but, as far as I can tell, they never rejected the presuppositions of the blood myth. If they manipulated genealogies in order to descend *culturally* from alien progenitors, they did so only with the understanding that genealogy per se remained an imperturbable and *transcendental* phenomenon. And the irony of the

new genealogical method was probably not lost on them. That is, an improved *technē* proved that charismatic blood descent was a feature of nature, and, as such, an unimpeachable divine source.

Even Michel Foucault, champion of using genealogy as a mirror held up to discontinuities, recognized how stable a value consanguinity was to the premodern world:

The blood relation long remained an important element in the mechanisms of power, its manifestations, and its rituals. For a society in which the systems of alliance, the political form of the sovereign, the differentiation into orders and castes, and the value of descent lines were predominant; for a society in which famine, epidemics, and violence made death imminent, blood constituted one of the fundamental values. It owed its high value at the same time to its instrumental role (the ability to shed blood), to the way it functioned in the order of signs (to have a certain blood, to be of the same blood, to be prepared to risk one's blood), and also to its precariousness (easily spilled, subject to drying up, too readily mixed, capable of being quickly corrupted). A society of blood – I was tempted to say, of “sanguinity” – where power spoke *through* blood: the honor of war, the fear of famine, the triumph of death, the sovereign with his sword, executioners, and tortures; blood was a *reality with a symbolic function*.
(emphasis in original)¹⁵

Foucault recognizes that social realities like famines and epidemics are counterparts of charismatic symbols in ordinary social life. The genealogical myth invests power in the sovereign and the nobility of a “bloody” society, but also serves a talismanic function, delivering those of “the same blood” from the wrack and ruin of current threats expressly through connection with the numinous force of “uncorrupted” blood inherited from ancestors. The symbolic function Foucault describes is *charismatically* sustained, perpetuated by shared rituals. The symbols themselves are indemnified by group participation in a myth of descent – of *sanguinité*, as Foucault puts it.

In this model there is simply no room for evolution, let alone for imitation. Horace speaks of “sampling” past poets to bridge the cultural gap with Greece. Seneca uses the apian metaphor, describing a bee flitting from flower to flower before digesting its intake in the course of mellification. But, popular as these descriptions of *imitatio* were after the Quattrocento, any attempt to see them as analogous to genealogy would have been heretical. To mix blood as a bee would mix different flowers, even if the result were meant to produce something as wonderful as honey, was equivalent to contamination. Such arguments as we find in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, when King Polixenes explains the grafting of flowers to Perdita, who he still thinks is a lowly shepherdess, tended to be little more than demonstrations of aristocratic hypocrisy.

Perdita. . . .the fairest flowers of the season
Are our carnations and streak'd gillyvors,

Which some call nature's bastards: of that kind
 Our rustic garden's barren; and I care not
 To get slips of them.

Polixenes. Wherefore, gentle maiden,
 Do you neglect them?

Perdita. For I have heard it said
 There is an art which, in their piedness, shares
 With great creating nature.

Polixenes. Say there be;
 Yet nature is made better by no mean
 But nature makes that mean: so, over that art,
 Which you say adds to nature, is an art
 That nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry
 A gentler scion to the wildest stock,
 And make conceive a bark of baser kind
 By bud of nobler race. This is an art
 Which does mend nature – change it rather – but
 The art itself is nature.

(4.4.81–97)¹⁶

As the editor of the Arden edition points out, “the dramatic irony of this passage has often been noticed. The king actually upholds the practice of marrying ‘A gentler scion to the wildest stock’ which he is about to condemn where his son is concerned.”¹⁷ Florizel, his son, falls in love with the shepherdess Perdita, at which point Polixenes repudiates the philosophy of “marrying” gentle scions and wild stock – even though he has already called Perdita “gentle maiden.”

As Polixenes makes crystal clear, the values of blood purity and royal genealogy are sacrosanct, and they are the counterparts to power. When he hears of Florizel's plans to marry Perdita he flies into a rage. “Mark your divorce,” he roars at his son, “thou art too base / To be acknowledg'd: thou, a sceptre's heir, / That thus affects a sheep-hook!” (4.4.418–21). He then turns to Perdita and viciously threatens her: “For thou, fresh piece / Of excellent witchcraft, who of force must know / the royal fool thou cop'st with – / . . . I'll have thy beauty scratch'd with briers and made / More homely than thy state” (4.4.423–25; 426–27). So much for the “gentle maiden” of the earlier passage. Here Polixenes shows his true belief about grafting higher to lower “stock,” and at the same time indicates the commonplace notion that outward appearance revealed (or should reveal) one's caste status. Perdita is simply too beautiful to be a shepherd's daughter (which, ironically, is true) and her face should match her blood – at least according to Polixenes. After excoriating Perdita, he turns back to his son and levels the worst punishment he can muster:

For thee, fond boy,
 If I may ever know thou dost but sigh
 That thou no more shalt see this knack (as never

I mean thou shalt), we'll bar thee from succession;
 Not hold thee of our blood, no, not our kin,
 Farre than Deucalion off.

(4.4.427–32)

If Florizel ever even sighs about not being able to see Perdita, the king will “not hold thee of our blood.” He’ll cut him off from the succession, and, he adds with genealogical emphasis, will not consider him any closer as blood kin than Deucalion (roughly equivalent in distance to Noah, though outside the Judeo-Christian myth system). Polixenes’s quick action against what he considers contamination highlights the intractability of the genealogical blood myth, at all levels of society. Of course, all’s well that ends well in *The Winter’s Tale* when everyone discovers that Perdita is in fact the *Princess* Perdita, long lost daughter of King Leontes, whose survival was kept secret.

Shakespeare manages to keep the traditions of blood in place while, just for a moment on stage, raising the old and ongoing question of merit versus birth. But the happy resolution seems to dull the question’s acuity. Perhaps a better example is John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* – better because the result is horror, disaster, and death, rather than the fortuitous discovery of Perdita’s noble parentage. In a well-known scene, Bosola, an Iago-like “creature” in the pay of the Duchess’s brothers, brings the Duchess some fresh “apricocks,” a fruit that combines a peach and a plum. Bosola feeds them to her to trap her into revealing her illicit pregnancy by her steward Antonio:

Bos. Apricocks, madam.
Duch. O sir, where are they?
 I have heard of none to-year.
Bos. [*Aside.*] Good, her colour rises.
Duch. Indeed I thank you; they are wondrous fair ones:
 What an unskilled fellow is our gardener!
 We shall have none this month.

Duch. . . . —’tis a delicate fruit,
 They say they are restorative.
Bos. ’Tis a pretty art,
 This grafting.
Duch. ’Tis so: a bettering of nature.
Bos. To make a pippin grow upon a crab,
 A damson on a blackthorn:—[*Aside.*] how greedily she eats them!
 (2.1:129–34; 144–47)

By the “pretty art,” Bosola means the grafting of plum and peach to produce an apricot. In a metaphorical sense, however, his insinuations refer to the secret marriage of the Duchess and Antonio, a characteristically doomed mixing of blood.

Outside drama, however, the science of grafting didn't usually predicate disaster, but instead suggested a creative, enhancing force. Despite the innuendos of *The Winter's Tale*, even Shakespeare elsewhere recognizes the value of grafting. His Sonnet 15 aligns the botanical practice with the poet's power to defeat "time" and "decay":

When I perceive that men as plants increase,
 Cheerèd and check ev'n by the selfsame sky,
 Vaunt in their youthful say, at height decrease,
 And wear their brave state out of memory;
 Then the conceit of this inconstant stay
 Sets you most rich in youth before my sight,
 Where wasteful time debateth with decay
 To change your day of youth to sullied night,
 And all in war with time for love of you
 As he takes from you, I engraft you new.

(ll. 5–14)¹⁸

The speaker "engrafts" the young man (addressee of the sonnet), husbanding a new youth and immortalizing him through verse. The reference to plants (l. 5) confirms the botanical metaphor, but, unlike Bosola's sinister reference to the "pretty art," Shakespeare emphasizes that grafting and poetry have equally supernatural powers.¹⁹

As a metaphor, or maybe even from a pragmatic angle, grafting lies at the heart of the blood myth. It is a technique that acts as the pretext and underlying structure to all aristocratic marriages, justifying the merging of families and the quartering of escutcheons. Grafting, like genealogy and *imitatio* both, is an ancient science. The technique of grafting, which both Polixenes and Bosola allude to, goes back to Latin (especially late Latin) authors and was the subject of numerous treatises from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. An anonymous translation of Palladius Rutilius Taurus Aemilianus, *On husbandrie*, from about 1420, makes the link to marriage explicit:

A diligent husbände enformed me
 That doutlesse every graffing wol comprende.
 Untempered lyme yf with the graffes be
 Put in the plages there thai shall descende,
 He saide either her sappe wol condescende
 Unto that mene, and glewe hemself yfere
 In mariage ymixt as though thai were.²⁰

Not only was the link made metaphorically, as in Palladius, but the association of botanical husbandry and real husband-and-wife relations is also found. John Fitzherbert's *The Boke of Husbandry* (pub. 1534) is a text replete with agricultural

instructions interlaced with strong advice on chivalry, reading, and, predictably, how to be a good wife. A glance at Fitzherbert's table of contents is revealing:

The chapters on grafting ("How to graffe") are followed by two obviously calculated inter-chapters: first, "A shorte information for a yonge gentyllman that entendeth to thryve," then a "lesson made in Englysshe verses" for a gentleman's servant. These chapters are themselves a graft – an *aestheticized* graft if we consider the versifying of the "lesson" – uniting the husbandman with the gentleman and acting as a bridge to the chapters on "the wyues occupation." As the last entry indicates, the elements of social "high degree" and prudent management merge, and it doesn't seem too strained an interpretation to suggest that Fitzherbert expected his readers to see a connection as well between successful grafting and successful marriage. For the wife and the gentleman's servant, subservience and restraint ("to eate within thy tether") accompany the general rule of "Howe menne of hye degree do keep measure."

Yet if subservience and keeping measure are at the forefront, choice, agency, and industry make up the background to grafting. This background, however subtly assimilated into consciousness, has significant weight in the development of

The table.		The table.	
cozser, and a bozse besche.	fol. f.	man thaten tendeth to thryue.	fol. eod.
Of swyne.	fo. eod.	A lesson made in Englysshe verses, that a	fol. eod.
Of bees.	fol. ii.	gentylmans scravaunte shall for get none of	fol. f. xv.
How to kepe beastes and othre catel	fo. liii.	his here in his inne behynde hym.	fol. f. xv.
To get fettes and set theim.	fol. liii.	A prologue for the wyues occupacion.	fol. eod.
To make a dyche.	fol. liii.	A lesson for the wyfe.	fol. eod.
To make a hedge.	fol. eod.	What thynge the wyfe of a knyghte is bounde	fol. eod.
To plashe and pleche a hedge.	fol. eod.	to dooe.	fol. f. vi.
To mende a hve wyve.	fol. f.	What warkes the wyfe oughte to dooe, genes	fol. f. vi.
To remeue and sette trees.	fol. f. j.	rally.	fol. eod.
Trees to bee sette withoute rootes and	fol. f. vi.	To kepe measure in spendyng.	fol. f. viii.
growe.	fol. f. viii.	To eate within the tecture.	fol. f. viii.
To sell woodde for housholdes or to sell.	fol. eod.	A bozse li. son unto the busbande.	fol. f. x.
To bryde, lop, or crop trees.	fol. f. viii.	Howe menne of hye degree do kepe measure.	fol. eod.
Howe a man shoulde brydde loppe or cropp	fol. eod.	Prodygalite in outragious and costelye as	fol. f. x.
trees.	fol. eod.	vape.	fol. f. x.
To sell woode or tymber.	fol. f. j.	Of despyous meates and dnykes.	fol. eod.
To kepe spryng woode.	fol. f. j.	Of outragious playe and game.	fol. f. x.
Necessary thynge belongng to graffynge.	fol. eod.	A prologue of the thryde saynge of the pph	fol. f. x.
What fruite shulde be firste graffed.	fol. f. j.	of popper.	fol. f. xii.
Howe to graffe.	fol. eod.	A dyversitee betwene pcedpacion and dos	fol. eod.
To graffe betwene the barke and the tree.	fol. f. j.	cityne.	fol. f. xii.
To nouryshe all maner of stone fruite and	fol. f. j.	What is rcheste.	fol. f. xii.
nuttis.	fol. f. j.	What is the propertee of a ri. s. m. a.	fol. f. xii.
A bozse informacion for a yonge gentyll	man	What ioyes & pleasures are in heuen.	fol. f. xii.
		What thynge pleaseth god most.	fol. f. xii.
		What be goddes commaundementes.	fol. eod.
			fol. eod.

Figure 1.2. John Fitzherbert, *The Boke of Husbandry* (1534), Table

early modern cultural genealogy, at least in part because the relationship between botanical grafting and genealogy was deeply embedded – maybe even more deeply than anyone realized. For example, in sixteenth-century French botanical terminology, the word *l'escusson* described a particular kind of graft known as a “shield-bud.”²¹ *L'escusson* (modern French *l'écusson*) means “escutcheon,” which ostentatiously spotlights the link between grafting in the natural world and grafting as a kind of human historical technique.

Max Weber suggested that “religiously or magically motivated behavior is relatively rational behavior (*relativ rationales Handeln*), especially in its earliest manifestations.”²² The “relatively rational” classification can be useful in understanding the early modern attitude toward apparently fantastic genealogies. The technique of grafting provided an excellent bridge between the natural-genealogical and the “relatively rational”-cultural, not least because grafting was seen to have supernatural qualities. As Giulia Pacini explains, “Ever since antiquity and across cultural traditions, grafting had been viewed as an invaluable agricultural practice. In 1600, the agronomist Olivier de Serres (1539–1619) defined it as a ‘science that by universal judgment has been considered the most excellent of Agriculture, as that which, by giving luster to the rest of land management, has been, not only cherished, but also virtually adored, by many great people struck at the contemplation of its *supernatural effects* ’” (my emphasis).²³ The raising of an agricultural technique to a supernatural phenomenon can only have helped license the idea of grafting in other spheres – like poetry, the founding of cities, philosophy, and even religion (e.g., Neoplatonism). Pacini goes on to praise grafting’s magical quasi-religious charge:

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century gardeners and writers echoed the hope that the “supernatural” products of grafting might facilitate the return of the earth to its prelapsarian state. . . . In *Les jardins de Betz* (1792), the revolutionary poet Joseph-Antoine-Joachim Cerutti (1738–92) proclaimed: “One will say that I want to restore the garden of Eden. But what can’t culture, industry, and grafting do? . . . The cultivator, man of genius, is the only magician who commands over the sun.”²⁴

Cerutti is writing long after the early modern period, but the sentiments he expresses regarding the powers of grafting derive from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts and translations of ancient works. Most significant, however, is the emphasis on the magical. The question “what can’t culture, industry, and grafting do?” might well stand as a recipe for the construction of cultural genealogies. Cerutti’s “culture,” taken in the sense of “cultivation” of the earth, added to industry and grafting, describes with an uncomfortable exactness the process by which later cultures imagined themselves attached to earlier cultures, and, with a magician’s command, translated the charismatic essence *genealogically* from antiquity to early modernity.

The science of grafting also underscores the technological modernization of older media of transformation. The presence of an accepted *technē* such as grafting

helped, not only to justify cultural-genealogical techniques, but also to lay a foundation of practical success. As a metaphor, or analogy, for cultural genealogy, grafting strikes a unique balance between a ransacking and deliberate emulation of the past and the retroactive linking of disparate cultural norms. The agency involved in grafting undermines the natural descent of genealogical pedigree, but, at the same time, the art of marrying “a gentler scion to the wildest stock” offers a satisfactory rationalization for the social agronomist’s dilemma. To build a family tree with roots in, say, Troy, cultural heralds of the early modern period needed a well-oiled technology to graft their alien civilizations to the past.

Despite their different results, the scenes from Shakespeare and Webster are straightforward representations of belief in the blood myth of linear genealogy. And neither of them is compatible with imitation. But nor are they compatible with cultural genealogy, a descent myth which was deliberately nonlinear in its aspirations. Manufacturing discontinuities was the stock in trade of humanist genealogists, whether they wrote about poetic, civic, linguistic, or other forms of descent. Moreover, I think it would be mistaken to assume the humanists were trying to suppress the act of manufacturing discontinuity. On the contrary, transcultural descents often gaudily advertise the leapfrogging of epochs, of national literatures, of religious institutions, or of ethnicities. There’s no question that, with tacit approval, a form of intercultural grafting occurs, even if it may be difficult to determine where to find the “wildest stock” and where the “gentler scion.” Does the pagan past civilize and therefore raise the cultural caste of the wild and rustic present? Or do contemporary mores gentrify the wild errors of the ancients?

These questions are not as ambiguous as they might seem. Even when it seems that the cultural glory of the past is, like a “gentler scion,” raising the cultural status of the present, the very process is tactically delimited by contemporary ideals. The technique of cultural genealogy created art forms of past achievements, thereby preserving the purity of origins in a manner similar to the blood myth. Charismatic essence remained of paramount importance in a milieu where, for instance, according to Michael Drayton, the pure love of Albion (England) herself could descend across cultures and great gulfs of time to arrive at the perfect match:

In hir yonger years,
 Vast Earth-bred *Giants* woo’d her: but, who bears
 In *Golden field* the *Lion passant red*,
Aeneas Nephew (*Brute*) them conquered.
 Next, Laureat *Caesar*, as a Philtre, brings,
On’s shield, his Grandame *Venus*: Him hir Kings
 Withstood. At length, the *Roman*, by long sute,
 Gain’d her (most Part) from th’ancient race of *Brute*.
 Divors’t from Him, the *Saxon sable Horse*,
 Borne by sterne *Hengist*, wins her: but, through force
 Garding the *Norman Leopards bath’d in Gules*,
 She chang’d hir Love to Him, whose Line yet rules.²⁵

This is a tale of colonization and national pride aestheticized as a systematic genealogy replete with heraldic blazons. The inspiration for the passage is Geoffrey of Monmouth's history filtered through William Camden's *Britannia*.²⁶ Composed when Elizabeth ruled England, though published under James I, this poem, which faces the frontispiece of Drayton's *Poly-Olbion*, emphasizes the power of female will, not only in shedding the colonial yoke of the Trojan "*Aeneas Nephew (Brute)*" but also that of Caesar and his legionary conquerors.

The heraldry is scrambled a bit, since, first of all, Brutus was Aeneas's grandson according to Geoffrey, and second, his shield too should have depicted Venus (who was Aeneas's mother). But so be it. What's important is that this transcultural, transethnic descent is framed in the pseudo-science of heraldic genealogy, the systematic new medium of early modern history. The content of the new medium, however, is definitely *not* the fanciful heraldic narrative or the blazonry. It is, simply put, blood – the old medium of familial power, "th'ancient race of *Brute*." The word "race" here, though clearly not used in a modern sense, nevertheless packs a punch.²⁷ It signals, above all, a successful transcultural movement. The connection to, and forcible disconnection from, the ancient "race" proves the indestructibility of Albion's essence. And, while the genealogical claim may be outlandish – though certainly fashionable, like the so-called Tudor Myth itself – the outlandishness of the claim is subordinate to the emphasis on blood and on the imperturbable transcultural descent of a numinous charismatic power invested permanently in Albion's political authority.²⁸

There is a similarly optimistic lineage in the title page from Richard Grafton's *Chronicle* (1569) reproduced as Figure I.3. Like the pyramidal chart (Figure I.1), this engraving depicts Elizabeth's notional descent as an inorganic process. Stacked boxes replace the typical arboreal growth, substituting a rigidly structured representation for a natural one. We seem to be looking into the compartments of a small household cabinet. Strangely for a genealogical descent, the lines between the kings and queen separate them rather than merge and meld their hereditary connections. As in other European royal fantasies, however, Moses and Brutus (grandson to Aeneas) are parallel in time and, presumably, in original charisma. The sacred and the secular seeds hold equal positions, separated only by a slim (Greek?) column rather than by the lines of a box. Inset above these foundational figures are two circles. Brutus's circle contains what appears to be Noah's Ark plying the floodwaters, complete with a small house built onto the deck; barely visible in the upper left corner are a few rays from the sun, no doubt to be followed by the branch-bearing dove. Moses's circle offers a glimpse of Eve and Adam – probably prelapsarian – with the sun beaming full bore on Eve. The lineage descends on the left of the page from Moses>David>Solomon and is mirrored on the right side by Albanact>Camber>Henry VIII. Leaps and bounds notwithstanding, Elizabeth sits complacently as the pedigreed inheritor of Trojan, Israelite, and antique native charisma. Ironically, the rigidity of the cabinet-boxes seems to represent her transcultural authority more convincingly than would the flowing branches of a family tree.



Figure 1.3 Richard Grafton, *Chronicle* (1569). Title page. By permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.

The imperturbability of this descent, however, like Drayton’s version, could never be confused with normal family genealogy. They are hardly automatic descents, that is, mechanical or biological.²⁹ Both are characterized, rather, by free choice and force of will – not unlike political authority itself which couples consanguinity with strength of judgment (the deterioration of which Renaissance tragedies so exquisitely exploit). The compartmentalized figures of Grafton’s engraving seem to represent consanguinity as a kind of boxed set of choices. In

Drayton's poem, on the other hand, the connections are more fluid. The descent of Albion from the period of the Giants through divorce and remarriage, until, finally, "She chang'd hir Love to Him, whose Line yet rules" reflects both the arrival unchanged of an English essence *and* the element of free choice. This is Drayton's conflation, proof that he has learned the humanists' lesson of essentialism well. In the language of heraldry, he represents the authenticity of bloodlines, but he shapes the pedigree himself, qualifying direct descent with the tendentious selection of ideal ancestors. He leapfrogs centuries, generations, and physical reality to demonstrate *accumulation* – the accumulation of time past in present charismatic rulership.

Notes

- 1 Franz Borkenau, *End and Beginning: On the Generations of Cultures and the Origins of the West*, ed. Richard Lowenthal (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981) 42, 43. Incidentally, George Orwell said Borkenau wrote the best book on the Spanish Civil War: *The Spanish Cockpit: An Eyewitness Account of the Political and Social Conflicts of the Spanish Civil War* (London: Faber & Faber, 1937; rpt. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963). Orwell's remark appears in *Homage to Catalonia*.
- 2 The term *cultural genealogy* used in this context is my own, although, subsequent to having begun to use it, I came across it in a late book by Clifford Geertz. Geertz uses the term differently, but it is worth noting that he links it to the historical imagination, as I do. See Clifford Geertz, *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000): "To the historical imagination, 'we' is a juncture in a cultural genealogy, and 'here' is heritage" (121).
- 3 The term *habitus* is Pierre Bourdieu's: "The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment . . . produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures." See *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) 72.
- 4 Andrea Giardina, "Explosion of Late Antiquity," in *Late Antiquity on the Eve of Islam*, ed. Averil Cameron (Farnham: Ashgate Variorum, 2013) 21.
- 5 Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1996) 33.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 The term *humanist*, which did not appear in Italy until the end of the fifteenth century, is generally applied to someone associated with the *studia humanitatis*, the history and dissemination of which are too well known to rehearse again here. But I would like to emphasize that I use the term *humanist* advisedly when I use it. The term is notoriously slippery, referring in the period most often to professional or quasi-professional status as a teacher of the expanded medieval *trivium* by intellectuals committed to a revival of ancient Roman and Greek language, literature, and philosophy. It is somewhat misleading, however, to refer to these intellectuals as members of a movement comparable, say, to Puritanism or Marxism or Futurism. Such comparisons implicitly misrepresent a disparate array of largely professional scholarly endeavors as products of a discernible ideological coherence. On the early uses of the term, see Augusto Campana, "The Origin of the Word 'Humanist,'" *JWCI* 9 (1946): 60–73.
- 8 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993) 11.
- 9 Julia Reinhard Lupton, *After Lives of the Saints: Hagiography, Typology, and Renaissance Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996) xviii.

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- 10 Stephen Greenblatt, ed. *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 7.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid., 2.
- 13 Hanan Yorán, “Florentine Civic Humanism and the Emergence of Modern Ideology,” *History and Theory* 46 (2007): 334.
- 14 Ibid., 333.
- 15 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1990) 147.
- 16 Shakespeare, *The Winter’s Tale*, Arden edition, ed. J.H.P. Pafford (London: Routledge, 1963; 1996) 94.
- 17 Ibid., 94, FN88–97.
- 18 Stephen Booth, ed. *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977) 16–17. Booth observes in his annotations, “I find no recorded Renaissance use of the verb ‘to engraft’ where its direct object is the receiving stock and not the grafted scion” (158).
- 19 Arguing against critics who say we should read *ingraft* as “urge to marry,” Helen Vendler says, “The meaning of *ingraft*, in the context of plants, seems to mean ‘to add substance through gardening.’” See *The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1997) 110.
- 20 Palladius, *On husbandrie* (ca. 1420, unique ms.), trans. Anon, ed. Barton Lodge, 75 [st. 57].
- 21 See, for instance, Olivier de Serres (1539–1619), *Le théâtre d’agriculture et le ménage des champs* (Paris, 1600), in which he devotes considerable space to grafting. “La maniere d’Enter en pieces rapportees a quelque correspondance avec celle de *l’escusson*: ayant ceci de commun, qu’un seul oeillet suffit à faire un Enté” (598; my emphasis) [“The manner of grafting in matching pieces,” he points out, “has some correspondence with that of a shield-bud: having this in common, that only one eyelet is sufficient to make a graft.”]
- 22 *Economy and Society*, 1978: 1:400. See *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Die Wirtschaft und gesellschaftlichen Ordnungen und Mächte. Nachlaß*, 22 vols. *Religiöse Gemeinschaften*, 2 vols., ed. Hans G. Kippenberg, with Petra Schilm and Jutta Niemeier (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 2005) 2: 1.
- 23 Giulia Pacini, “Grafts at Work in Late Eighteenth-Century French Discourse and Practice,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 34 (2010): 1–2.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Michael Drayton, *Poly-Olbion, or a Chorographical Description of Tracts, Rivers, Mountaines, Forests, and other Parts of the Renowned Isle of Great Britaine, with Intermixture of the most Remarkable Stories, Antiquities, Wonders, Rarities, Pleasures, and Commodities, of the Same: Digested in a Poem* (London, 1613), in *The Works of Michael Drayton*, 5 vols., ed. J. William Hebel (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956) 4: ii, “Upon the Frontispiece.”
- 26 See William Camden, *Britannia*, trans. Philomen Holland (London, 1610) ch. 1: “But, to let passe all the rest, one Geffrey Ap Arthur, of Monmouth among us (whom I would not pronounce in his behalfe liable to this suspicion) in the reigne of King Henrie the Second, published an Historie of Britaine, and that out of the British tongue, as he saith himselfe, wherein he writeth that Brutus a Trojane borne, the sonne of Sylvius, nephew of Ascanius, and in a third degree nephew to that great Aeneas descended from supreme Jupiter (for the goddesse Venus bare him), whose birth cost his mother her life, and who by chance slew his owne father in hunting (a thing that the wise Magi had foretold), fled his cuntry and went into Greece, where he delivered out of thraldome the progenie of Helenus K. Priams sonne, vanquished king Pandrasus, wedded his daughter, and accompanied with a remnant of Trojans, fell upon the Iland Leogetia: where by the Oracle of Diana he was advised to goe unto this Western Isle.

From thence thorow the Streights of Gebraltar, where he escaped the Mer-maydes, and afterward thorow the Tuskane sea, he came as farre as to Aquitaine, in a pight [pitched] battell defeated Golfarius the Pict, king of Aquitaine, together with twelve Princes of Gaule; and after he had built the citie Tours (as witnesseth Homer) and made spoile of Gaule, passed over sea into this land inhabited of Giants, whom when he had conquered, together with Gogmagog the hugest of them all, according to his owne name he called it Britaine, in the yeere of the world 2855, before the first Olympiad 334 yeeres, and before the nativitie of Christ 1108. Thus farre Geffrey.”

- 27 See, for example, Jean E. Feerick, *Strangers in Blood: Relocating Race in the Renaissance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010) 13: “If critics of race have tended to identify skin colour as the period’s dominant marker of difference, I propose that its role in either blocking or enabling access to social power should be seen as in relation, and even as subordinate, to the symbolics of blood that express this period’s cosmology.” Feerick cites Foucault’s discussion of bloodlines, *op.cit.*, n6. For a tonic approach to race and genealogy, see Benjamin Braude, “The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 54 (1997): 103–42.
- 28 The “Tudor Myth,” absurd as it might seem outside its early modern context, is, in Hans Blumenberg’s phrase, “a high-carat piece of logos” (*Work on Myth* 12). See *Charisma and Myth*, Chapter 1, esp. 31–37. On the Tudor Myth, see the still useful article by S. K. Heninger, “The Tudor Myth of Troy-Novant,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 61 (1962): 378–87.
- 29 See Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 124: “the aristocracy had . . . asserted the special character of its body, but this was in the form of *blood*, that is, in the form of the antiquity of its ancestry and of the value of its alliances; the bourgeoisie on the contrary looked to its progeny and the health of its organism when it laid claim to a specific body. The bourgeoisie’s ‘blood’ was its sex. And this is more than a play on words; many of the themes characteristic of the caste manners of the nobility reappeared in the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, but in the guise of biological, medical, or eugenic precepts.”

1 The lie of descent

Freud maintained that religion was based on a lie of salvation. In *The Future of an Illusion*, he recounts how he used to tell fairy tales to his children and how his son would come up to him afterward asking if the story were true. When told it wasn't, "he would turn away with a look of disdain." Freud observes drily that "[w]e may expect that people will soon behave in the same way toward the fairy tales of religion."¹ He had hopes that the maxim ascribed to Tertullian, *Credo quia absurdum*, which is taken to mean religious doctrines supersede and are exempt from reason, would someday soon be debunked and human beings would realize they create their own gods.

Needless to say, Freud's hopes and expectations haven't materialized and religious fairy tales live on. Even the *Credo quia absurdum* survives, indeed has found renewed inspiration, defiantly revising the original to something like *Credo quia possim credere*. The religious life with its "absurd" promise of salvation continues to attract people at all different levels of intellectual sophistication. Nature and moral conduct come together in various doctrines and rationalizations of faith, producing a kind of salvationistic logic that justifies a connection to the deity of choice. Here, for example, is a fairly straightforward and supportive explanation of the religious rationale:

By helping to lift men above the level of bestial vegetation, faith contributes in reality to the securing and safeguarding of his existence. Take away from mankind its education-based, religious-dogmatic principles – or, practically speaking, ethical-moral principles – by abolishing this religious education, but without replacing it by any equivalent, and the result will be a grave shock to the foundations of their existence. We may therefore state that not only does man live in order to serve higher ideals, but that, conversely, these higher ideals also provide the premise for his existence. Thus the circle closes.

Of course, even the word "religious" includes various basic ideas or convictions, for example, the indestructibility of the soul, the eternity of existence, the existence of a higher being, etc. But all these ideas, regardless how convincing they may be for the individual, are submitted to the critical examination of this individual and hence to a fluctuating affirmation or negation until emotional divination or knowledge assumes the binding force of apodictic faith.

This is from the second volume, chapter 1 of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. Nevertheless – that is, despite the author's notoriety – my guess is that most believers in religion would not object to Hitler's characterization of the term "religious" and the relative importance of "apodictic" – what he defines as "clearly delimited" – faith.²

Significantly, Hitler proceeds straight from this passage to his primary argument, which slyly links faith to a form of genealogy, suggesting a connection between Freud's lie of salvation and the lie of descent. Of course, the content of Hitler's argument is so offensive we can easily dismiss it. He begins with a flourish that ineluctably reminds us that rhetoric is only the counterpart of dialectic – that it isn't logic we're dealing with, but something slightly less: "The situation with the term 'folkish,'" Hitler explains, "is similar to that with the term 'religious.'"³ Then, following a too-familiar screed against the international Jewish-Marxist conspiracy, he leads us as if by sensible argument to his vision of a nation that should dominate the so-called mongrel and negroid races. The itinerary of Hitler's thought has a bearing on the subject of genealogy. He says:

The folkish philosophy finds the importance of mankind in its basic racial elements . . . it [i.e., the folkish concept] by no means believes in an equality of the races, but along with their difference it recognizes the higher or lesser value and feels itself obligated, through this knowledge, to promote the victory of the better and stronger, and demand the subordination of the inferior and weaker in accordance with the eternal will that dominates this universe. Thus, in principle, it serves the *basic aristocratic idea of Nature (dem aristokratischen Grundgedanken)* and believes in the validity of this law down to the last individual.

(my emphasis)⁴

I deliberately emphasized the words *Nature* and *aristocratic idea*. While we know how destructively Hitler's association of these terms manifested itself, it is important to acknowledge that the association of nature and aristocracy is hardly his, but is as old as Western civilization itself. Indeed, the most sacred and revered texts we have – both canonical and noncanonical – contain the same association of nature and aristocracy. These are the texts that form what might be called the epistemological backbone of Western culture.

It isn't my aim, by using *Mein Kampf* as an example, to mount an attack on text-based faith, but neither is it my intention to sanitize the history of cultural-genealogical thinking so that readers will not be upset. Hitler successfully "piggybacked" on existing arguments, building from faith to aristocracy to fascism. Ironically, his use of religion helps us realize that faith-based thinking is *not* per se fascist. Moreover, that Hitler cleverly instrumentalizes existing cultural thought is hardly a new insight, but here it serves the purpose of highlighting both the pervasiveness and, in the wrong hands, the perverseness of cultural genealogy.

Examples are ubiquitous, so much so that listing a few seems too obvious. How does one demonstrate the equivalent of saturation? The ingrained and acculturated

parallel between (N)ature and aristocracy is so deep even now that it would seem more absurd to explain aristocracy as a function of environment and economics than of magical bloodlines. Like the genealogical conditions Hitler alludes to in his phrase “aristocratic idea,” determinations of aristocracy have less to do with so-called scientific genealogy than with an abiding faith in the charismatic privilege accorded to particular lines of descent – even *when* those lines of descent are scientifically researched by, say, a College of Heralds or the Mormon Church. The element of faith at work here, so similar in kind to the faith in salvation, conflicts with the idea of genealogy as a proof-positive of descent relations. Belief and reason commingle, supported at all times by the charismatic myth of superior kinship. Freud had hoped, again in *The Future of an Illusion*, that if we were able to learn more about the motives which led to the creation of religious doctrines, religious faith would cave in upon itself:

We shall tell ourselves that it would be very nice if there were a God who created the world and was a benevolent Providence, and if there were a moral order to the universe and an after-life; *but it is a very striking fact that all this is exactly as we are bound to wish it to be.*

(my emphasis)⁵

This last sentence offers an excellent parallel – or a further parallel – with genealogical myth, and in particular the charismatic idealizations of transcultural descent during the early modern period. Cultural genealogy, as practiced by the humanists, manifested the same sort of wishful thinking Freud describes. Just as salvationistic religion dresses its most outlandish fictions in doctrines and canonical law, so Renaissance cultural genealogy legitimized its selective approach to descent relations by raising its rhetoric to a systematic, quasi-scientific plane.

But, ultimately, Freud was right about motives. Since the eighteenth century, as philology improved, historical writing became more than mere opinion, and rationalistic philosophy gained a footing, the grip of cultural genealogical myth on the social imagination has weakened. It hasn’t disappeared, as is obvious from such absurdities as Hitler’s piggybacking on the authority of genealogical science to support the assertion that nature and the aristocratic principle come together in his program of Aryan domination. This kind of piggybacking is much more common in the post-Renaissance world than might be “expected,” to use Freud’s word. One no longer finds the proliferating descents from Troy popular in earlier histories, nor does one encounter family trees of poets leading from Orpheus and Amphion through Homer, Hesiod, and Virgil to, say, Elizabeth Bishop or Seamus Heaney. Instead one finds a more sanitized version of the idea of transcultural descent, a nostalgia that assumes the relationship without resorting to improbable (and irrational) linkages.

Hypostatized institutional symbols, affirming stability and indemnified value in disciplines other than literature – heraldic pedigrees, for example, or monotheistic religion – differ substantially from the consummately literary remythicizations that marked the coming-into-being of cultural genealogy. Yet these institutional

symbols deserve to be analyzed as products of more or less baseless transcultural descent – if for no other reason than that modern culture continues to accept them as valid.

Much has been made over the past few decades of National Socialism's debt to Nietzschean philosophy. Yet, will-to-power and *Übermensch* notwithstanding, I doubt Nietzsche would go along with Hitler's inflation of genealogical categories to include such abstractions as nature and faith. According to Nietzsche most genealogies are gray, by which he seemed to mean that they lack the colorful narratives of history, narratives of the sort Hitler deploys.⁶ For Nietzsche, as for Foucault after him, the emphasis is on methodology – a patient poring-over of dull source material. This is indeed how we think of genealogical discovery. Moreover, in our post-Baconian (or post-Marlovian) world, we supposedly judge genealogy and faith by different standards. Genealogy we take to be an empirical, more or less scientific process, one that authorizes itself on textual records – a pronouncedly gray science. Whereas faith we seem to agree is not science at all – and, at least in principle, we infer an absolute division between genealogical science and salvationistic faith.

Yet, despite our methodological scrupulousness, the lie of descent persists. Hitler's manipulation of it is only the most sensational example. Our genealogical imaginations continue to reflect an unquestioning faith in exiguous or nonexistent descent relationships. Moreover, we still don't seem to see that, for the most part, these relationships reflect discursive gestures rather than natural truths. In 1934, not long after *Mein Kampf*, Ruth Benedict wrote trenchantly in her *Patterns of Culture*, "We know roughly what heredity is from father to son. Within a family line the importance of heredity is tremendous. But heredity is an affair of family lines. Beyond that it is mythology."⁷

Devolutionary science

The mythology of heredity is of primary concern in the study of cultural genealogy, a mythology not merely of extended family lines, but also of sweeping imaginative inheritances passed down from society to society and civilization to civilization. All genealogy is myth. It is based, not on a lie of salvation, but on a lie, or fiction, of descent. But unlike belief in salvation, which is a matter of faith, belief in genealogy is susceptible to proof. We cannot disprove religion or faith, but we can prove that all genealogy is myth. We can prove that all supposedly verifiable descent that calls on a transportation of charisma down through generations, nation-states, ethnic bonds, or religious canons constitutes a mythicized form of misrepresentation and fraud.

The basis of this misrepresentation lies in the conflict between an etiological or teleological appearance and a devolutionary necessity. This cannot be reiterated strongly enough. Genealogy is fundamentally devolutionary. It telescopes time backward. Its devolutionary mode of characterizing the passage of time mythicizes time, systematically balancing teleological anxiety with etiological permanence. This is more appropriately termed a remythicization, an ongoing

charismatic process that both destabilizes and depersonalizes the myth of time passing.

As noted earlier, aristocratic genealogy, which survives longest and provided early modern authors with the best model for cultural genealogy, strives to preserve an original charisma that sets apart a particular house, family, or clan. But, while the original charisma usually stems from a single exceptional figure, genealogy itself is a function of the depersonalization of that original charisma, the transformation of a charismatic claim from an individual or personal gift into an immortal inheritance shared out among members of a household or transferred through blood ties.⁸ As Max Weber explains,

Instead of individual inheritance we find the immortal household as property-holder vis à vis the succeeding generations. In the beginning, charisma too is hereditary only in the sense that household and lineage group are considered magically blessed, so that they alone can provide the bearers of charisma. . . . Because of its supernatural endowment a house is elevated above all others; in fact, the belief in such qualification, which is unattainable by natural means and hence charismatic, has everywhere been the basis for the development of royal and aristocratic power.⁹

This charismatic basis of genealogy is important to remember. Charisma tends to become diluted as it moves down the generations, away from the original charismatic figure who starts a movement or lineage group. Yet genealogy retains its force only by sustaining the myth that a particular blood tie somehow preserves the original magic of the charismatic founder of the line, movement, or institution.¹⁰ As a result, genealogy is antithetical to the teleological or even the evolutionary assessment of history because the strength of a line of descent lies in the myth that an original magical element remains intact *despite* the passage of generations. To contend that this magical element evolves is to suggest that it is subject to mutability, being both transformable and unstable. But mutability, transformability, and instability are patently threatening to the genealogical imagination, in particular to any notion of the genealogical preservation of an original or essential charisma from generation to generation, stretching back *ad fontes*. Devolution and stability are the watchwords of genealogical idealism.

There is good reason to apply this same pattern of devolution and stability to cultural genealogy even if cultural genealogy is not descent as a natural process but descent as a manufactured ideal. Bloodless, and therefore less (or maybe more) verifiable, cultural genealogy varies little from the idealization of charismatic inheritance as practiced by aristocratic genealogy – except of course that the charisma preserved by cultural genealogy entrenches a different kind of nobility, claiming a different path to divine auspices. In fact, cultural genealogy is manifest in the act or practice of a particular *ars*, while aristocratic (or natural) genealogy by definition reflects no deliberate agency.

Leszek Kolakowski identifies the common motivation of myth in Western culture as “the desire to arrest physical time by imposing upon it a mythical form

of time; that is, one which allows us to see in the mutability of things not only *change*, but also *accumulation*, or allows us to believe that what is past is retained – as far as values are concerned – in what endures.”¹¹ Both the providential myth and the genealogical myth are examples of what Kolakowski terms the “arrest” of physical time; indeed providential salvation and genealogical prestige have often been associated in Christian as well as other religious cultures that have embraced a version of providential or at least divine history. The genealogical myth in particular reflects a pragmatic application of this arrest of physical time. Its supposed veracity rests on the notion that the present is linked indissolubly to the past, and that “seed” and familial essence can be retained intact despite “the mutability of things.” Change may be incorporated into the myth of descent, but *accumulation* is the overriding motivation of genealogical survival. The putatively indissoluble link to the past functions in the present, at the tip of the genealogical branch, as proof that the most recent descendants can avoid being seen as having arrived too early – not too late, as theories of literary influence sometimes proclaim – too early for eschatological redemption, for the privilege accorded to “old” families, and for the pedigree necessary for social authority. Genealogy carries with it a sense of deserving whose justification is continuity and time accrued.

Genealogy functions simultaneously as science and myth. The reason for this is that faith in charismatic inheritance remains a strong, if not impregnable, fortress. Léon Poliakov, in an interesting study called *The Aryan Myth*, quotes Weber on the “hair’s breadth division which separates faith from science.” With fascism and other forms of Aryan mythicizing in mind, Poliakov speaks of “pseudo-religious apologies for the white race,” and “theological exegesis [that] ingenuously adapted the Bible to make the most of the curse on Ham” (304). (I’m tempted to substitute “ingeniously” for “ingenuously” in the latter phrase.) Poliakov traces versions and antecedents of the Aryan myth over centuries, from sixteenth-century Jesuits in the New World and China, through Enlightenment apologists down to such notorious nineteenth-century racial theorists as Houston Stewart Chamberlain, whose 1,500-page tome *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* provided Nazi Party philosopher Alfred Rosenberg with his model. Oceans of ink have been spilled over this subject and, even if I had the expertise, I wouldn’t want to wade into these waters. But I’d like to make one point: as one reads through the scores of Aryan theorists, all of whom struggle to show how the Jews distorted the course of religion, faith, and nationhood, the presiding sentiment is that of a developmental history. In other words, the acknowledgment of Aryan or Teutonic superiority requires the recognition that a particular divine gift has been passed down in genealogical fashion to a unique race. In Chamberlain, as in *Mein Kampf*, the false association of nature and charismatic privilege is always present. This is a necessary association to make in genealogical arguments, and most people accept both the association and the argument without question, even if they don’t always like the members of a particular family tree.

Genealogical descent is fundamentally a lie, however, not simply because it has a rhetorical or argumentative constitution – there are good as well as bad arguments, after all. Rather, descent is a lie because it is based on faith in charismatic

inheritance and on the myth that grows from that faith. The genealogical arguments are merely a form of casuistry. Aside from the most basic biological attributes – a familiar nose, baldness, skin color, or height – nothing but a myth of authority is passed down from generation to generation. As Weber noted, the original member of a house or clan has some special gift or authority in his or her community that attaches itself to other family members when that original figure dies. Out of personal interests in retaining the authority of the original charismatic figure, the other family members construct a myth out of the founding father or mother. Thus is born a lineage. We generally think of these lineages in aristocratic terms, such as the descent of the Roman emperors all the way to Charlemagne; or in terms of religious callings, like the Catholic priesthood or the selection of the Dali Lama; similarly, there have always been lineages of warrior elites like Nazirites or dervishes, and there have also always been chosen tribes descended from one prophet or another. But of course the notion of a founding figure can have as much influence on a smaller, domestic level. The antecedent of an ordinary family – for example, “grandpa who fought at Guadalcanal” or “great-great-grandmother who arrived at Ellis Island as a mail-order bride” – can also be the source of a numinous charismatic element that is magically transported down the generations. It may manifest itself in belief in particular family qualities like stubbornness or fear of the sea or bad luck in marriage. Although, clearly, psychological components contribute to the propagation of family qualities – if your mother is afraid of dogs, in all likelihood so too will you be, chiefly from exposure to her fear and little experience with dogs – beneath the psychological elements there stands a foundation of genealogical fiction.

Invariably, the support for the fiction is Nature with a capital “N,” the same contingent myth Hitler used to support his “aristocratic principle.” From the time we reach an age of understanding we are told by parents, by religious beliefs, by the poetry we read and the songs we listen to, and by the example of living relations, that it is *natural* to see ourselves as descendants in a particular lineage. It is *natural*, according to this universal logic, to recognize that no person can be self-authored (as Satan claims to be in *Paradise Lost*) and that *therefore* it is natural to believe in the descent not only of a family line but also of the attributes associated with that line (even unto Teutonic superiority). Despite appearances, however, this is not logic. It is a deductive error, a catachresis – or, as I said earlier, a piece of persuasive rhetoric masking itself as scientific proof.

This kind of misrepresentation, this fabrication of privileged *natural* descent, is very ancient, as old as any textual evidence we have. Let me return to Poliakov for a moment. He begins *The Aryan Myth* with two long quotations from Hitler to demonstrate the distorted “historical philosophy of National Socialism’s leader” (2). He then remarks on the commonplace element of all historico-philosophical anthropology, warped or otherwise: “The members of a human group descend from a god, or a hero, or an animal. The genealogical myth is therefore the first type of historical thinking and, at least in this respect, it is true to say that there are ‘no societies without history’” (3). Poliakov’s acknowledgment that the “genealogical myth” is fundamental to historical thinking has great significance for this

study, but we should approach the word “history” carefully, for it merges with myth, and, more problematically, with the function of myth in belief systems. Nietzsche maintained that genealogy and history were incompatible, and we can see why. “History” per se has no function in social belief systems, at least not until it can be mythicized to accommodate a group experience. Jean Seznec refers to early genealogies of the kind Poliakov describes as ethnogenic fables, which is probably a more useful word than “history” in the context of genealogy. To understand what he means we need only think, for example, of the Homeric *aristeiai* replete with initial recitations of charismatic ancestors; of the ethnic fabling that creates such figures as Ruth and Samson in the book of Judges; of the hereditary myth that claims Hercules as the progenitor of the Roman Antony’s family line; or of the heraldic genealogy that traced Queen Elizabeth I’s family tree to Eden.

In essence, most genealogy, and particularly cultural genealogy, is ethnogenic fabling manipulated to establish simultaneously the truth of the descent myth and the reality of particular lineages. Underlying this kind of fabling is a conviction that transcultural descent is a natural occurrence in the development of humankind. Yet, more often than not, transcultural descent bridges languages, mores, religious differences, geographical distance, and vast time periods. To accept one’s inheritance across these impossible gulfs requires an abiding faith in the lie of descent. Consider, for instance, the genealogy that transfers the survivors of the biblical Flood to ancient Rome: according to this legend, Noah and his three sons arrived on a raft in Italy and built a town where Rome now stands, at which point Japheth sired the Roman god Janus, making Noah the grandfather of a Roman deity.¹² Or, in a different version based on what Marie Tanner refers to as the “plumbed – or invented” history of Berosus the Chaldean, “medieval historical chronicles effected a quantum leap in genealogical pretensions”:

In twelfth century references to Berosus’s ancient history, knowledge of the past is amplified to reveal that at the origins of civilization, the priest-kings of the Old Testament and of Roman mythology were not only alike in functions but of a single identity. Although they were known by different names in the scattering of the races that followed the Deluge, Noah and Janus were in reality one and the same person.¹³

Laughable to us now, but no more of a stretch than genealogies accepted as functioning myths by contemporary ethnic or religious groups.

Again, examples – and quantum leaps of genealogical pretension – abound. For Christians, Muslims, and Jews alike, genealogy held profound authority. As Averil Cameron puts it, “One technique employed in the Qur’ān, as in the Bible, was genealogy: the genealogy of Mary . . . was a theme shared in Muslim scholarship and in the Christian-Jewish debates, and the descent of the children of Israel became a major issue.”¹⁴ Cameron calls genealogy a “technique,” which it was, but the divine genealogies she refers to constitute more of a cultural descent myth than a genuine heraldic technique. What’s important is that the myth is expressed in genealogical terms.

John Speed's *Genealogies of the Holy Scriptures* (1611) is a case in point (see Figure 1.1). His *apologia* "To the Christian Reader" begins with an large "T" in a box, which holds an internal engraving of, presumably, the New Testament Timothy, whom Speed cites, aptly, in the margin: "Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: *so do*" (1 Tim. 1:4).¹⁵

The large "T" might well be meant to remind learned readers of the Hebrew word *tôlēdôt*, "genealogies" – the famous "begats" of the Tyndale/King James translation. Further, however, the quotation from Timothy is meant to highlight the contrast between Speed's genealogies and the "fables and endless genealogies" Timothy eschews. Pagan gods, proliferating Israelite tribes, Mohammedan descendants, and all less-than-divine Others fail to measure up to the one true genealogy: while the fables and false genealogies produce only questions, the genealogy of Jesus is divinely edifying.

The lineage of our blessed Saviour (which is our principall scope) is knowne by a Chaine-like traile, continued from Adam to Sem, pag.1. and thence to Terah and Abraham, pag. 3. & c. So likewise from David, p. 22. to his sonnes Solomon and Nathan, p. 33. And lastly to our Saviours parents, p. 34. linked together (as other marriages here) by the sculpture of an hand in hand.

Significantly, the "sculpture of an hand in hand" appears just as Speed explains it will for all marriages in the *Genealogies* (Figure 1.2). But just below the "sculpture," in the engraved scene, the couple's hands are demonstrably broken apart, with Adam seeming to reach for Eve's hand just as she takes the fruit from the serpent's mouth. And several other elements are striking – including the oft-remarked absence of marriageable women for Cain, Abel, and Seth. Curiously, Adam sports a handsome and evidently well-groomed moustache. This raises questions Speed probably didn't intend to ask, and if asked, would not have found amusing. Nevertheless – does prelapsarian man have to shave his beard?; and if so, with what tool? (Adam's hair seems well cut, too, no doubt to the appropriate Protestant length.) Is Adam vain of his appearance, in that perfect bubble of time before sins of *vanitas* and *superbia* entered the world? Or, is it that, like Eve's prelapsarian "wanton locks" tumbling innocently down her neck in *Paradise Lost*, Adam's moustache before the fall was a kind of neutral adornment? It's pretty to think so.

Regardless of the religious connotations, however, the engraving, and the accompanying genealogical chart, implant a later cultural norm into the center and origin of Christian civilization. Adam's grooming might seem insignificant, but in fact it is a frank demonstration of how to localize ancient cultural values by means of stylization. Adam's visage has been refashioned in the current vogue. The engraving places in Eden a man who resembles a (naked) seventeenth-century courtier/cavalier, with Death at his feet. The quotation from Romans in the box assimilates the foundational myth of Hebrew culture into the Christian myth of the *felix culpa*, the superseding lie of salvation. This is a prime example of the colonializing nature of cultural genealogy.

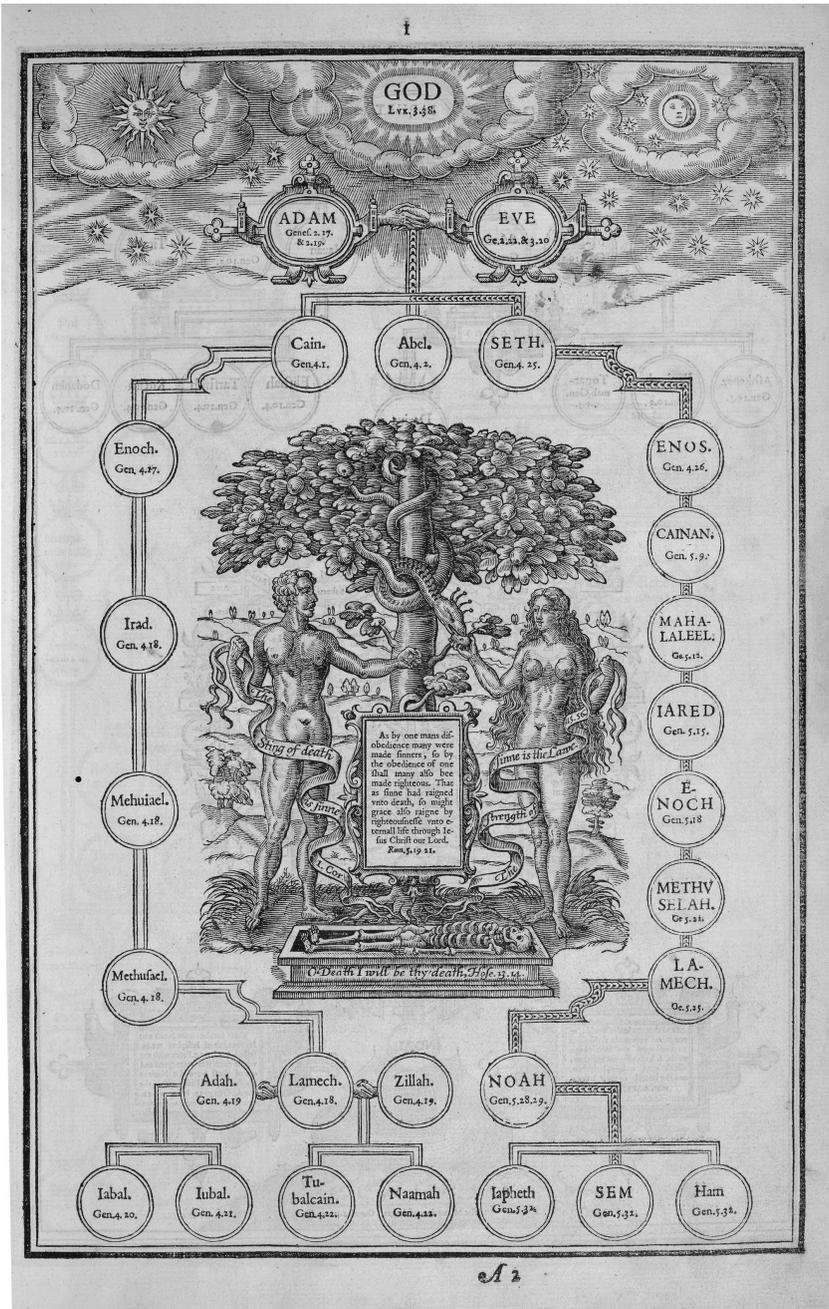


Figure 1.2 The Genealogies of the Holy Scriptures – Adam and Eve (1611). By permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.

Like other descent images in the *Genealogies of the Holy Scriptures*, the apparatus surrounding the unhappy couple seems inorganic, artificial, and even engineered. But the image also conveys a technological competence and a concomitant genealogical authority. Similarly, the tree that springs from Noah's Ark, though meant to represent the most common arboreal metaphor for genealogy, contains branches as straight and regular as the carpentered pillars on the ark below. The irony of genealogical trees is that they represent descent in rising, or ascending, branches – the inversions and distortions of the blood myth seem to be built into its most familiar depiction. Similarly, in the genealogical tree below, the transference of technique and materials inverts the organic process: the wooden ark seems to produce the tree, rather than the other way around. No careless boughs stray, no leaf is out of place. It's less a tree than an architectural design.

Even Babel and the scattering of tongues appear as an orderly genealogical structure (Figure 1.4). As Speed says, for Christians, “the lineage of our blessed Saviour” is the “principall scope” of holy genealogies going back to Eden, and he asserts that Jesus' lineage “is knowne by a Chaine-like traile.” The image of the unbreakable chain linking Hebrew myth to Christian myth derives from the first book of the New Testament with its long genealogy from Abraham to Jesus – unfortunately unaccompanied with a genealogical table. Matthew names fourteen generations, but there are thirty-eight begats from Abraham to Joseph, making Jesus number thirty-nine – so the word “generation” has to be defined flexibly here. This is no doubt the most famous family tree in Western culture. It is a “fantasy” tree because, in addition to its suspicious selection of only male descendants, ancient Israel kept no records, there were no Israelite heralds who could have managed thirty-nine begats, and the final branch is fudged. But what appear to be erroneous records are probably deliberately shaped narratives, because, as the entry for “Genealogy” in the Eerdmans Dictionary puts it, “Genealogies (Heb. *tôlēdôt*) function as an important medium of expression and interaction.” The definition describes foundational examples of cultural genealogy:

Once taken at face value, biblical genealogies have come under scrutiny by critics who have recognized “apparent contradictions” and thus have considered them as artificial and tendentious creations. However, genealogies are actually *accurate explanations of the milieu in which they were created*, even if they do not correspond to Western notions of objective data.

(my emphasis)¹⁶

Seeking legitimacy for their idealized descents, the humanists imitated the narrative, “explanatory importance” of biblical genealogies and discovered the freedom and usefulness of having fungible ancestors. According to Eerdmans,

Lineage ties usually had little to do with ethnic identity, since no such concept existed in the ancient world, but often rather were concerned with political unity. Acknowledgment of blood ties was not the only function of a

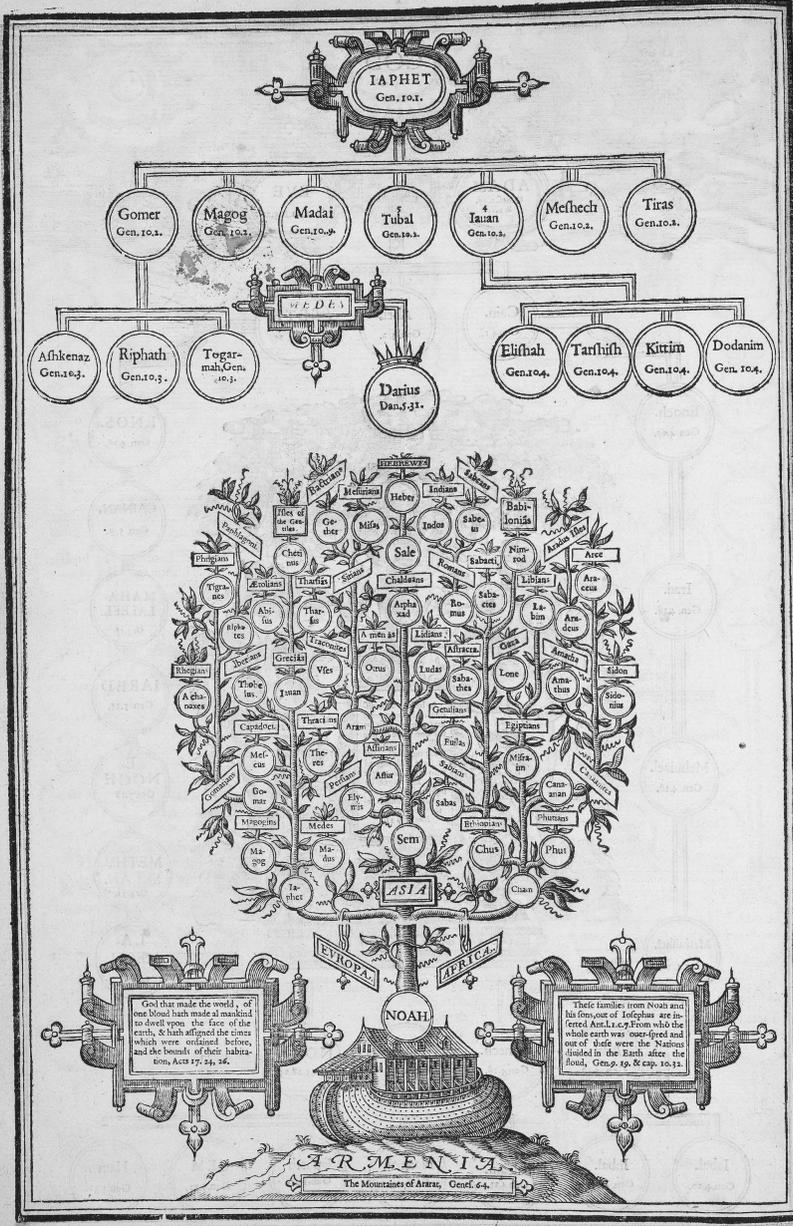


Figure 1.3 The Genealogies of the Holy Scriptures – Noah’s Tree (1611). By permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.

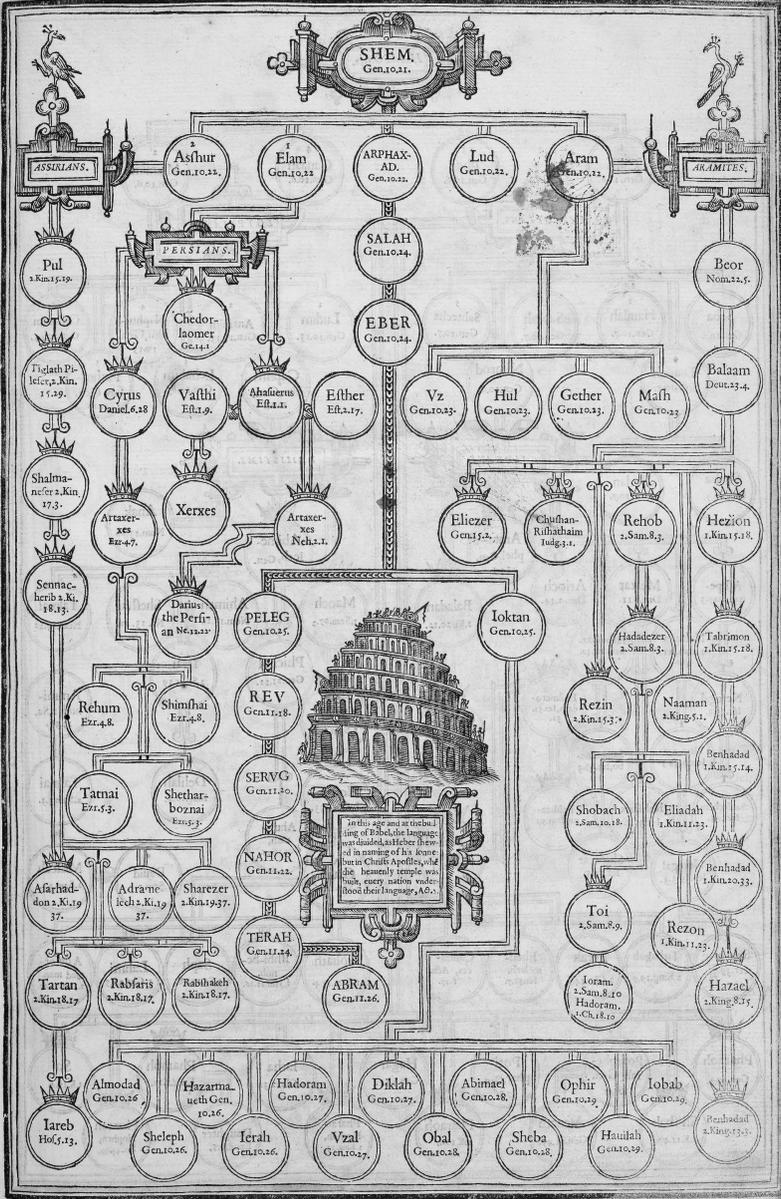


Figure 1.4 The Genealogies of the Holy Scriptures – Tower of Babel (1611). By permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.

genealogy. A person received status by virtue of his kinship ties. *Genealogies were altered when their functions changed.* Some names of ancestors disappeared (when they no longer had a relevant function), while other names were added.

(my emphasis)¹⁷

As a model for the fabrications of humanist origin-seeking, no practice could offer higher authority. The notion that “[g]enealogies were altered when their functions changed,” even if only grasped intuitively in the early modern period, paved the way for the tendentious distortions of cultural genealogy. The Bible dictionary all but says “all values are local” in pointing out that *political* relevance determined the inclusion or exclusion of ancestors.

So, to return to the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew, early modern authors (and readers) couldn’t help but recognize the generational leaps and deliberate exclusions from what is a consummately charismatic descent. In our terms, it is a masterpiece of altering ancestors for function’s sake and freezing time in an anti-teleological way. The genealogy records a degeneration from the dizzy political heights of Davidic and Solomonian kingship to the humble station of the honest carpenter. Simultaneously, however, Matthew has traced an original charismatic essence – a divine *chrism*, or anointing – that travels *intact* from Abraham to Joseph and Jesus. The completely patriarchal genealogy leads straight to Joseph, which, of course, presents the most significant problem of the genealogy. Both Matthew and Luke insist on a virgin birth. Therefore, if Joseph wasn’t actually the father of Jesus, the long reach of patriarchal charisma seems misplaced. There were in fact disputes about this sacred evangelical genealogy along the way. Faustus the Manichean, for instance, arguing against Augustine, became somewhat exercised by the notion that Jesus could have descended through the tribe of kings. He believed that we should follow Mary’s line back through the priestly tribe of Levi, a reasonable enough suggestion in light of the evangelists’ insistence on a virgin birth. But really what these objections reveal is the clash between one form of inaccuracy and another, between attempts to supplant one “explanation” of the divine milieu with another – for the sake of political unity. Despite appearances, these disputes are born, not from bloodlines or biology, but from sociopolitical imperatives. They are cultural genealogies, clearly displaying the fungible nature of even the foundational descent of the Christian myth. No self-respecting humanist could miss this lesson. It’s no wonder that, between Christ’s genealogy and the Noah>Japheth>Janus descent legend, there really isn’t much to choose – they are different, as John Milton might say, though in kind the same.

La généalogie est grise

Cultural genealogy is an oxymoron if we take *culture* to mean “nurture” or “refinement” (as in manners and arts) or “cultivation,” which would be reasonable considering the origin of the word and its association with tilling the earth (remember the hot “coultter,” or plow blade, of Chaucer’s “Miller’s Tale”). Yet culture has

not always meant or suggested human cultivation, despite its etymology. As Terry Eagleton observes:

With its resonance of organic process and stealthy evolution, culture was a quasi-determinist concept, meaning those features of social life – custom, kinship, language, ritual, mythology – which choose us far more than we choose them. Ironically, then, the idea of culture cut both above and below ordinary social life, at once incomparably more conscious and considerably less calculable. “Civilization,” by contrast, has a ring of agency and awareness about it, an aura of rational projection and urban planning, as a collective project by which cities are wrested from swamps and cathedrals raised to the skies.¹⁸

The “culture” of cultural genealogy borrows from both these concepts, describing at once a putatively organic process and the result of what Eagleton calls “rational projection.” For Renaissance writers, the culture they formed from reaching backward to the ancient past chose them more than they chose it – or, at least, this is the illusion they wished simultaneously to create and to believe in. And it is in this feature, in being chosen by the past, that “culture” coincides with the “genealogy” of cultural genealogy. For genealogy implies an immutable (charismatic) essence passed down from generation to generation, an essence from the past that chooses its present bearer without requiring nurture or cultivation – indeed, the ideal of genealogy is that one inherits good attributes effortlessly and naturally along with good blood.

The term “cultural genealogy” is decidedly *not* an early modern term. Nonetheless, because of the ubiquity of the genealogical method in the period, I think we could do worse than to seek a term that can serve an explanatory function in regard to these widespread genealogical practices themselves, and (perhaps) provide a new descriptive category. One of the aims of this book will be to understand why, for instance, we find the origins of cities framed in language conventionally used to chart the descent of family charisma. Why should different Renaissance-era nationalities describe themselves in terms of their transcultural pedigrees? Why should the history of manners (as one example among many) require a genealogical justification? In other words, how, and for what set of complex reasons, did ordinary genealogy, from family trees to heraldic blazons, become the framework for the epistemological imperatives of cultural genealogy?

In the Renaissance, the term *genealogy* seemed to remain relatively stable in meaning and utterly chaotic in practice. From Boccaccio’s confused *Genealogia deorum gentilium*, in which there is no order of descent that we would deem genealogical, to the corrective genealogies of the gods we find in Cartari, for example, and the French and English heralds’ frenetic but ultimately orderly adducing of ancestral lines, the practice of genealogizing grew right alongside the inclination to omit and revise for highly tendentious purposes. Even from very early on, as in the fourth-century *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville, an element of critique disguised as selection infused genealogical recitation in the area

of cultural advancement and accomplishment. His descending catalog of pagan philosophy, especially those “Dicti . . . Theologi, quoniam in scriptis suis de Deo dixerunt,” is full of contempt. His quasi-generational list of errors leads from the Stoic Dionysius, Pythagoras, Plato, and “Maro,” among others, through the heresies of the Church characterized by the Arium Trinity and the “Platonicus furor” of Valentinus.¹⁹ Isidore clearly means to communicate kinship in this catalog, but his main objective, here as elsewhere, is a frankly biased recitation of origins masked as an “etymology.” Much of the *Etymologiae* we would regard as merely taxonomy, such as the discussions of lapis, iron, and marble. But other areas, such as poetry and religion (not to mention the unique and fascinating section on theater), contain the seeds of precisely the kind of critique found in early modern origin myths. Even the obvious selectivity and disorderliness of the etymological descents adumbrates the early attempts at cultural genealogy in later periods. Missing from Isidore, however, is the new technology of scientific genealogy.

The idea of genealogy as critique is important because it links early modern practice with that of contemporary cultural philosophers. But in recent decades *genealogy* itself has become a charged term, largely because Michel Foucault took it up as his method of critique. In a famous essay – “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” – he wrote that the form of genealogy he intended to apply opposed itself to history as a search for origins.²⁰ He resisted the concept that there were essences to be discovered in historical developments, and that those essences provided the foundation for a linear or teleological understanding of the past. This is not the place to go into a discussion of Foucault’s genealogical method in detail, although I think it is important to see where it intersects with my own method and where it diverges.²¹

Where my method intersects with Foucault’s, my subject matter – which is also genealogy and also a method – diverges. Foucault claims that *his* version of genealogy “does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things; its duty is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present, that it continues secretly to animate the present.”²² This claim deliberately reverses the traditional idea of genealogy and conflicts with the fundamental concept of cultural genealogy, which is indeed “to restore an unbroken continuity.” That the act of restoration in cultural genealogy invariably involves a manufactured *discontinuity* with the recent past is only one of the curious attributes of the *cultural* genealogical method as practiced by authors from Virgil to Vico. It is a method of restoration nonetheless. The cultural genealogical method, therefore, utterly differs from the Foucauldian genealogical method.

But I am not a cultural genealogist. It will be immediately clear in the following chapters that I am not *doing* cultural genealogy in the way Nietzsche is doing the genealogy of morals and Foucault the genealogies of truth, power, and sexuality. It may be, however, that, in the sense meant by Foucault (and Nietzsche before him), I am writing a genealogical critique of cultural genealogy by seeking the epistemic relationships that support and grow out of a particular discursive ensemble. Foucault once pointed out, in explaining the difference between

archaeology and genealogy in his work, that “[W]hat I mean by genealogy is both the reason and the target of analyzing those discourses [unearthed by archaeology] as events, and what I am trying to show is how those discursive events have determined in a certain way what constitutes our present and what constitutes ourselves.”²³ This is a useful methodological key. There is certainly a resonance between my view of the role cultural genealogy has played in the Western episteme and Foucault’s observation that discursive events have determined “what constitutes our present and what constitutes ourselves.” My aim throughout this study will be to analyze cultural genealogy as an existing and active phenomenon by historicizing it, by describing its ideological function across the disciplines and over time, and by estimating its contribution to the modern episteme. If this is a genealogical critique, so be it.

But I must emphasize that the complementary objective of my approach is to identify and record the transmission from a conscious mythicization of genealogical association between cultures to the automatic, assumed, embedded, constrained ideology of cultural descent that results from absorbing the original mythicization into the myriad discourses affected by the modern relationship to past cultures. In this respect my analysis of cultural genealogy differs from Nietzschean or Foucauldian genealogy. Whereas the recognition of conscious genealogizing plays no part as an initiating principle of Nietzsche’s and Foucault’s genealogical critiques, it is crucial to tracking and understanding the myth of cultural genealogy and its transformations.

Cultural genealogy is consummately selective and therefore arbitrary in its reliance on human choice rather than physical necessity to determine descent, although, in the myth of cultural genealogy, descent is meant to seem natural, expressly not the result of human agency. In regard to choice it differs from conventional genealogy – technically you can’t choose your ancestors, unless you have the wherewithal to bribe a herald – but it also differs from Foucauldian genealogy. The latter eschews choice and seeks through a complicated (and somewhat paradoxical) notion of descent to establish necessary (although not strictly causal) connections productive of the generation of relationships governed, often, by some form of power.²⁴ Foucault’s program of genealogy as critique is designed explicitly to counteract the fabling of historical narratives. On the contrary, cultural genealogy, even when used as an analytic tool by Renaissance authors, engages in serial fablings to establish its bona fides and to sustain its charismatic authority in the realm of contemporary values. It is analogous to what Nietzsche refers to as the “plastic power” of a culture: “the capacity to develop out of oneself in one’s way, to transform and incorporate into oneself what is past and foreign, to heal wounds, to replace what has been lost, to recreate broken moulds.”²⁵ Appropriately, Nietzsche is speaking in this passage about forgetting the past, about “the boundary at which the past has to be forgotten if it is not to become the gravedigger of the present.”²⁶ The early practitioners of cultural genealogy seem to have thought the same way. They deliberately set their boundary with history and forgot the immediate past. Through cultural genealogy – their form of “plastic power” – they transformed and incorporated into themselves what was past and

foreign, they replaced what had been lost, and they recreated the broken molds of ancient cultures.

But let me underscore how dependent cultural genealogy is on conventional notions of *descent* despite the apparently *consensual* choosing of ancient antecedents.²⁷ Because it deploys genealogical practices, cultural genealogy supports the status quo of social power structures at least methodologically, if not always in detail. In its most common form, genealogical analysis has always been used to ensconce a ruling class, or (as in the case of the Mormons, for example) retroactively to establish an elite lineage. Regardless of Foucault's insistence that we see genealogy as antithetical to history and to the search for origins, genealogy remains in its most prominent form an instrument of power, lending support to the "monumental history" both Nietzsche and Foucault repudiate in favor of "critical history" and a genealogical approach to the past – which makes their decision to use the term *genealogy* puzzling, especially in Foucault's case. More importantly, all conventional genealogy implies a charismatic endowment passed down through time, an enduring numinous element Foucault simply does not address in his choice of genealogy as a method.

Because charismatic endowment is at the heart of cultural genealogy, it could be said that this book sets side by side two kinds of genealogy: one, a methodological genealogy of critique, discovery, evaluation, interrogation, and refutation of cultural ideals; the other, the fact of cultural genealogy – its discovery perhaps the product of the former – a unique form of reconstructing origins that not only avoids the notorious *pudenda origo* but results in forms of artificial cultural descent very often in direct conflict with the ideas of history and evolution by which our society sets so much store. The institution of an artificial cultural descent is in effect the institution of a myth, and therefore I will be concerned throughout the chapters with myth theory, demythology, and remythification.

I want to emphasize, however, that the two kinds of genealogy coexist in this book. As much as I may concentrate on specific examples of cultural genealogy and its dissemination, I deliberately make use of genealogy as a methodological critique to extricate the morals and justifications that provided the foundation of the myth. These two kinds of genealogy to an extent mirror the relationship between archaeology and genealogy that Foucault suggests in the passage I quoted earlier. Foucault saw an interaction, or interdependence, between the archeological and genealogical methods. This book often exhibits a similar interdependence. At times I feel as if I were performing a Foucauldian archaeology to unearth the particulars of cultural genealogy and simultaneously analyzing what I have unearthed as a discourse, or set of discourses, vulnerable to Foucauldian genealogical critique. But I am more skeptical than Foucault about the unifying element of power in the genealogical critiques; or maybe, like the later Foucault, I am simply more of a Weberian and tend to look for multicausality in all social productions, even in something as apparently delimiting as cultural genealogy. In any case, the name of the method is finally less important than the results of the interrogations since the terms *archaeology* and *genealogy* themselves reflect the establishment of disciplines we are likely to question.

In that same famous essay Foucault follows Nietzsche in declaring “La généalogie est grise” – “genealogy is gray” – by which he seems to mean that it lacks the colorful narratives of history.²⁸ Nietzsche had claimed that his genealogy was documentary gray in contrast to English genealogy, which, he asserted somewhat cryptically, was blue (perhaps because it gazed off into the blue). For Nietzsche, as for Foucault after him, the emphasis is on methodology – patient, documentary, a poring-over of dull source material, a historicizing of the search for (nonexistent) origins. No form of genuine genealogizing can avoid patient documentary work. But the genealogies I have in mind are anything but dull: they may be repetitive, but they are replete with wild connections and extraordinary remythicizations. The notion of transcultural descent that deliberately calls on extra-lineal charismatic connections defies the stereotype of dull diagrammatic genealogy. Foucault called genealogy “méticuleuse et patiemment documentaire,” but not much that’s meticulous or patiently documentary is manifest in cultural-genealogical posturing. Neither the fashioning nor the reading of imaginary genealogies requires a documentary patience. Better to have a figurative mind than scholarly tenacity to understand first their content and, finally, the authority of the process. I have no idea what color the version of genealogy explored in this present essay would be. I suspect, however, that one color alone, whatever it happened to be, would be insufficient to symbolize the myriad transformations of cultural genealogy.

Notes

- 1 Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961) 36–37.
- 2 Adolph Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1943; 1971) 379–80.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 380.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 383.
- 5 Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, 42.
- 6 See *Dits et Écrits*, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 2001) 2: 136: “La généalogie est grise; elle est méticuleuse et patiemment documentaire. Elle travaille sur des parchemins embrouillés, grattés, plusieurs fois réécrits.” Cf. Paul Rabinow, ed. *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984): “Genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times” (76).
- 7 Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1934; rpt. 1989) 15.
- 8 For more on depersonalization in regard to myth and myth systems, see my *Charisma and Myth* (London: Continuum, 2010) chap. 2.
- 9 Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, 2 vols., ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978) 2.1136.
- 10 For a fuller treatment of charisma and blood ties, see my *Charismatic Authority in Early Modern English Tragedy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) esp. 70–77.
- 11 Leszek Kolakowski, *The Presence of Myth*, trans. Adam Czerniawski (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989) 4.
- 12 See Léon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth: A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe* (London: Chatto-Heinemann, 1974) 60.

- 13 Marie Tanner, *The Last Descendant of Aeneas: The Hapsburgs and the Mythic Image of the Emperor* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993) 87.
- 14 Averil Cameron, "Remaking the Past," in *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*, eds. G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) 11.
- 15 John Speed, *The Genealogies of the Holy Scriptures* (London, 1611), "To the Christian Reader."
- 16 Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000) 490. The entry on genealogy is by Mark W. Chavalas.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000) 28. See Richard Waswo, *The Founding Legend of Western Civilization* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1997). Waswo links "culture" and "civilization" through "Cybele, the Great Mother, who became the protectress of both agriculture and civic life" (xi). Waswo doesn't seem to acknowledge the irony that Eagleton indicates.
- 19 Isidore, Bishop of Seville (Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi), *Etymologiarum sive Originum, Libri XX*, 2 vols. (without page numbers), ed. W. M. Lindsay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911; rept. 1971) VIII.vi.18–23. On poets, see esp. VIII.vii.3: "Vates a vi mentes appellatos Varro auctor est."
- 20 Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) 76–100, esp. 77. The original article appeared in *Hommage à Jean Hyppolite* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971) 145–72 and is now collected in Michel Foucault, *Dits et Écrits, 1954–1988*, vol. 2, 1970–75, ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 1994) 136–56.
- 21 There is a considerable literature on Foucault's genealogical method. See C. G. Prado, *Starting with Foucault: An Introduction to Genealogy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995) for a useful bibliography; also Michael Mahon, *Foucault's Nietzschean Genealogy: Truth, Power, and the Subject* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).
- 22 Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 81.
- 23 Cited in Mahon, *Foucault's Nietzschean Genealogy*, 105.
- 24 The question of causality is complicated. Nietzsche resisted Hume's notion of causality in emphasizing the "all too human" condition of subjectivity. But Hume's idea of causality is what is now referred to as "regularity," while analytic philosophy has identified many other kinds of causality, some of which seem to describe the Nietzschean idea of the genealogical relationship adopted by Foucault. See, as a starting point, David Lewis, *Philosophical Papers*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 159–269. This long section is titled "Causation" and lays out both the philosophical and bibliographical groundwork of the subject.
- 25 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 62. See also Mahon, *Foucault's Nietzschean Genealogy*, 96.
- 26 Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 62. Significantly, Ernst Robert Curtius takes exactly the opposite position. "Culture," he says, "is not only monumental, but is also initiatory in the mind. For memory, its supreme mistress, permits its true servants to share in the ancestral initiations and, by renewing these within them, gives them the strength for new beginnings, new departures. Memory is a dynamic principle; forgetting is weariness and interruption of movement, descent and return to the condition of a relative inertness." See *European Literature in the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953) 395.
- 27 For a discussion of descent and consent in the American context, see Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); I discuss the application of Sollors' work to early modern poetic genealogy in my *Conceived Presences: Literary Genealogy in Renaissance England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994) 11–12.
- 28 See note 6 of this chapter.

2 The technology of descent

Systematic genealogy developed as a new technology in the early modern period. Previous forms of recording descent relations were eschatological and prophetic, following the biblical precedents of Genesis and Matthew. The relationship between these two genealogical approaches is of paramount importance to understanding how ordinary genealogy laid the foundation for a persuasive and enduring myth of cultural genealogy. By the late fifteenth century the notion of genealogy as a systematic process had begun to emerge from the chaos surrounding late antique and medieval notions of recording descent relations. This is not to say that scientific genealogy, as we know it today, developed immediately. In fact, it wasn't until the seventeenth century that genealogy became reliable. Yet, nevertheless, regardless of its now laughable blundering, genealogy that purported to be systematic had a new legitimacy in the Renaissance. It was proof of progress from medieval incompetence, and, as is well known, soon became a fashionable rage in the public life of the period. From kings to courtiers to middle-class glovers like John Shakespeare, the urge to establish ancient, and often highly implausible, familial origins became all but an obsession. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Elizabeth traced her lineage back to Eden, while, in the same vein, Maximilian peppered his genealogy with fabricated heirs from all the important ancient tribes, empires, heroes' families, religions, and nations. For ordinary courtiers, much of the ferocious activity surrounding genealogical origin-hunting had very practical aims: if one could prove good blood, one's chances of patronage improved exponentially. Heralds became arbiters of considerably more than archival veracity, and as a result many of them were suborned, which resulted in the production of outlandish genealogical records bearing the imprimatur of officialdom. Although scientific genealogy later helped to clear away some of these more outlandish claims, *cultural* genealogy reaped invaluable benefits from the fictitious lineages in establishing a myth of transcultural descent.

The key to the early humanists' use of this new *technē*, and maybe one of the key justifications for humanism itself, was the fact that systematic genealogy acted as more than merely a new technique or technology. It was seen as a kind of new medium, represented both by images and linguistic nomenclature. Genealogies could be translated into complex heraldic charges or drawn as family trees or captured in list-like descents (which were sometimes quasi-narrative). The media

themselves, however, were not the message of these genealogies. The message was, as Marshall McLuhan long ago argued, an earlier medium. I don't want to strain this point, or patch in much-debated media theory where it doesn't belong. But I've found the association between systematic genealogy and other forms of technological media very productive for understanding how a myth like that of cultural genealogy, which is so implausible to us now, should have been embraced as a living myth during the Renaissance.

In a much misunderstood phrase in the first edition of *Understanding Media* (1964), McLuhan coined the now axiomatic "the medium is the message." The phrase quickly degenerated into a cliché, as Terence Gordon's critical edition points out, but McLuhan resented having to explain himself in print and it wasn't until the second edition of the book, thirty years later, that he offered an expansion on the original concept. The first chapter of that later edition, titled with the phrase that caused all the trouble, begins this way:

In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message. This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium – that is, any extension of ourselves – result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology.¹

The revolutionary element of McLuhan's statement is the counterintuitive notion that it isn't the *content* or the message a new medium delivers that affects "personal and social consequences." Rather, it is the medium itself that expands, extends, and otherwise affects those consequences. This statement is interesting as a complement to Borkenau's remark, with which I began this book. For if we interpret McLuhan's passage in relation to the warning from Spinoza that "every definition is also an exclusion," we can see how the means of making determinations – of "splitting and dividing" – introduces all manner of possible social extensions. But it isn't the determinations themselves, as Borkenau saw, that define a period. Instead, it's the "style" of making those determinations – the parallel between "style" and "medium" being significant in this context. But whereas Borkenau refers to style without identifying particular media, McLuhan tends to link the "dividing and splitting" to new technologies. Nonetheless, we should not ignore the parallel. Genealogical practice, especially when applied to the inventions of cultural genealogy, grafts a distinctive style to an emerging technology.

According to McLuhan, in an explanation pertinent to my discussion, "The medium is the message" means, in terms of the electronic age, that a totally new environment has been created. The content of this new environment is the old mechanized environment of the mechanized age." Of course, for "electronic age" we have to substitute something different. Yet in comparing the early modern period to past epochs – both in our own historical imaginations and in the prejudices of the period – we find as definitive a technological change as the one McLuhan identified. Not only moveable type – obviously the most well known – but also

other innovations such as Palladian architecture and linear perspective created new environments whose “content” was inevitably an older environment. McLuhan’s explanation for this phenomenon is fascinating:

This older environment was elevated to an art form by the new mechanical environment. The machine turned Nature into an art form. For the first time men began to regard Nature as a source of aesthetic and spiritual values. They began to marvel that earlier ages had been so unaware of the world of Nature as Art. Each new technology creates an environment that is itself regarded as corrupt and degrading. Yet the new one turns its predecessor into an art form.²

The humanists might not have thought of themselves and their intellectual world as “corrupt and degrading,” but they certainly considered themselves unworthy descendants of a golden age. By means of the “environment” their cultural genealogies created – shadowing the new technology of systematic genealogy – they made art forms of their ideals in ancient poetry, politics, philosophy, and even painting, of which nothing remained from antiquity.

Vertical time

Ideas, practices, and values rarely descend unaided from one culture to another. On the contrary, they are given form by the later culture, often from the roots up and often as works of art. Antiquity may provide suitable seeds for contemporary ideals – like euhemeristic ancestors (Hercules>Marc Antony) – but the ideals themselves actually grow from current social needs and do not descend “naturally” from the past. This is as true of the ideas of valor or beauty as it is of the Habsburg name. A backward formation occurs, in which rationalization comes first and inheritance second. Transcultural descent is brought to life in a compound of assimilation and distortion. The selection of ideal ancestors is combined with choosing and reintegrating particular values from the past to produce the perfect progenitor, all under the guise of natural descent relationships.

The process of assimilation and distortion is not confined to cultural genealogy, as is well known. Arthur Kinney some time ago concisely described a similar process in regard to humanist poetics. He quotes Edward Said on “filiation” and “affiliation,” noting that the imitation of past texts allowed the humanists to discover modes of conduct, ethics, speech, and “patterns for their own critical and imaginative writing.”³ Significantly, Kinney adds that “at the same time that they imitated their past, however, they adjusted its lessons to suit their own times and needs, and their texts everywhere display this need, or what Said calls affiliation, which ‘enables a text to maintain itself as a text.’” Kinney refers to what he calls this “Janus-view of texts” as “a primary cause of the dialectic the humanists enact” and his conclusion is valuable: “Humanist poetics is therefore a dynamic poetics because it is forever mediating past and present, filiation and affiliation. Such mediation adds yet a further conative dimension, and a deeper purpose, to humanist poetics as a poetics of exploration and collusion.”⁴ The combination

of affiliation and dynamism has striking resonance, not only with assimilation and distortion, but also with the construction of transcultural genealogy and its propagation as living myth. Although Said's terms tend to polarize the activity of humanist poetics, and to underplay the distortion resulting from arbitrary "affiliation," Kinney's notion of collusion brings to the fore a fundamental question: collusion with what cooperating agency? As dynamic as the relationship with the past might be, there can be no real collusion except with invented antecedents. Inevitably, the "conative dimension" Kinney identifies subsumes the dialectic.

The humanists actively sought to blur the line between filiation and affiliation, ascribing to the former what was patently the product of the latter. Consequently, in the absence of a genuine dialectic, cultural genealogy, in the right hands, transformed the Greco-Roman past into an art form, and, with the use of an emerging genealogical technique, created itself out of an older environment. As Thomas Hyde has remarked in discussing Boccaccio's *Genealogia deorum gentilium*, genealogies "do not derive from an origin but create it." He adds that "the origin is precisely the vanishing point of authority, and so it is as much made as found."⁵ This, or something very much like it, is Tacitus's point in the *Annals* (5(6).10) when he observes, "Fingebant simul credebantque" ("They invented and at the same time believed"). He is referring to the creation of gods in primitive society: though human products, the myths and the gods those myths describe are worshiped as divine in origin. G. B. Vico cites the same phrase from Tacitus in explaining the "divine" origins of poetry. "Their poetry was divine," he asserts in *The New Science*, "because . . . they imagined the causes of the things they thought and wondered at to be gods."⁶ Thus, Vico goes on, identifying the origins of the maxim *Iovis omnia plena* ("All things are full of Jove"): "The theological poets created the first divine fable, the greatest they ever created: that of Jove, king and father of men and gods, in the act of hurling the lightning bolt; an image so popular, disturbing, and instructive that its creators themselves believed in it, and feared, revered, and worshiped it in frightful religions."⁷

Frightful religions indeed! As I've discussed elsewhere, religions only seem "frightful" or alien or static or false to unbelievers.⁸ The process of simultaneous creation and belief Vico describes is common to all religions, in that religions can survive only if they continue to change and evolve. And the process is not confined to religions, or, for that matter, to so-called primitive societies. In Renaissance authors, the remythicization and manipulation of ancient charismatic symbols produces the same kind of simultaneity. Without the coincidence of creation and belief, as, for example, in the re-enchantment of the *prisci poetae* or in the fabrication of Trojan descent to France and England, the genealogical myths of humanist culture might not have survived.

The concept of simultaneity is at the heart of this book. Time and genealogy, though not usually linked, have an interdependent relationship in the mythical structures of the early modern period. This relationship characterizes the self-conscious efforts of intellectuals – and of others as well – to adjust to seismic shifts in the economic value of time. The integration of genealogy, which is a form of simultaneity, and time, whose wingéd chariot hurries near, represents an

attempt to stabilize *through myth* the breakdown of such vital institutions as the medieval church and the old feudal hierarchies that were being threatened by merchant-class accumulation. Similarly, as risky expansionist ventures were undertaken overseas, new economic instabilities threatened the European superpowers. According to Ines G. Županov, for example, in sixteenth-century Portugal, “a fear of geographical overextension, combined with an inability to consolidate and control ‘possessions,’ presented a permanent source of anxiety.”⁹ The antidote, or at least the salve, for this ongoing economic anxiety was a form of genealogical myth that grew in the stereotypical humanist pattern from poetic expression to political self-inscription. Županov, who is eloquent on the subject, is worth quoting at some length:

Refashioning a small, unruly band of sailors and soldiers, led by Vasco da Gama, into the valiant successors of the conquering Roman legionnaires, supported in their actions by the Roman gods themselves, Camões consecrated all present and future Portuguese Asian conquests as a “new” *imperium Romanum*. This poetic vision was in fact all-pervasive in sixteenth-century Portugal, and it coexisted with the darker side of Portuguese imperial ambition.

This version of legitimization – or “consecration,” in Županov’s terminology – depends on a myth of transcultural descent, an obviously fraudulent and opportunistic revaluation of *romanitas* to suit Portuguese needs. The charismatic character of *romanitas* justifies, at least in mythopoesis, Camões’s genealogical “refashioning” of da Gama’s exploits. But this kind of genealogical preservation of past values, forced into the Procrustean bed of the early modern present, produced more than merely parallels with conquering legionnaires. It also produced a Messianic link to the future – the ultimate proof of charismatic endowment.

As Županov explains:

The fantasy of successful *translatio imperii* that the Portuguese shared in the sixteenth century with the Spanish monarchy, with which they had stood “united” from 1580 to 1640, acquired an eschatological streak in the later seventeenth century, due to António Viera’s belief that the re-established Portuguese royal dynasty was predestined to rule the fifth and last earthly empire before the advent of the Judgment Day.¹⁰

It isn’t surprising that even as late as the “later seventeenth century” the fiction of *translatio imperii* gave genealogical legitimacy to Portuguese dynastic posturing. Dynasties have always relied on this kind of authority. The surprise in this case is the eschatological addition – that the Portuguese dynasty, because of its unique and divinely guided transcultural descent, would outlast all other empires and come to rule the entire earth. This kind of devouring ambition is difficult to reconcile not only with the reality of the superseded Portuguese empire, but, more importantly, with conventional Christian principles. Not unlike the predatory

Christianity of the 1,000-year Reich, it depends on the remaking of a past environment (*imperium Romanum*) into an art form, an idealized and aesthetically protected set of values to adopt as signs of the royal pedigree. The past and future divinity of the transcultural descent could not exist without the remythification of the ancient Roman environment.

Cultural genealogy, like all technical media, has a performative element. As we can see in the discussion of the Portuguese, the performance of cultural genealogy, either as mythopoesis in the *Lusiades* or in the eschatological pedigree of the dynasty, allows it to fulfill social needs on a heterogeneous basis, surviving in (and at times fostering) an atmosphere of cultural disequilibrium. This is a form of charismatic management, and it is useful to realize that charisma functions in tandem with myth to resolve social situations of mild chaos. Consequently, forms of authority like cultural genealogy have the power not only to legitimize the past but also, as performative forces, to reforge the inchoate elements of the past into an irreducible set of present values – art forms – a set of values charismatically immunized to erosions of time and transformation.

It is a commonplace of criticism on the populations of late medieval and Renaissance cultures to assume an absolute difference between their way of distinguishing past, present, and future and ours. There's nothing wrong with this assumption in theory, since all epochs have their own living myths of time. The problem arises when critics contend either that earlier epochs had no idea of time or that their ideas were utterly alien to ours. This kind of differentiation leads to a suppression of certain continuities in historical conceptualization – as in the case of conventional genealogy, which is alive and well today, and relatively unchanged from earlier periods. Cultural genealogy is a different story, of course, but even cultural genealogy is not as alien in some of its masks as might be thought.

Comparing the Middle Ages to antiquity, Erich Auerbach sought to establish the difference between what he termed the “horizontal” and “vertical” dimensions of time:

If an occurrence like the sacrifice of Isaac is interpreted as prefiguring the sacrifice of Christ, so that in the former the latter is as it were announced and promised, and the latter “fulfills” (the technical term is *figuram implere*) the former, then a connection is established between two events which are linked neither temporally nor causally – a connection which it is impossible to establish by reason in the horizontal dimension. . . . It can be established only if both occurrences are vertically linked to Divine Providence, which alone is able to devise such a plan of history and supply the key to its understanding.¹¹

Auerbach's division of the concept of time into horizontal and vertical uncovers a shift in myth systems. In McLuhan's terms, he is describing the transformation of an old environment into an art form through the use of a comparatively new exegetical *technē*. The content of this new *technē* is vertical time – a charismatic concept of time because it transcends the everyday and fulfills extraordinary needs through a link to a divine gift of grace.¹²

Vertical time is an art form in the sense that it transforms ephemeral or temporal occurrences – such as birth and death – into permanent aesthetic objects – such as Maximilian’s descent from Aeneas or the prefiguration of Christ’s martyrdom. Once aestheticized, these permanent and transcendent representations of time become the living myth expressed throughout culture in poetry, painting, sculpture, ritual, fetish, and worship. There are scores of aesthetic representations of vertical time in the medieval and early modern periods, many of which, like the Jesse tree in Figure 2.1, characterize the verticality as a movement from roots to branches.

This is a miniature illumination taken from a psalter produced in the workshop at Brailes, ca. 1240–50. The large initial B appears on the first page of the first Psalm, “Beatus vir” or “Blessed is the man.” In this version of a popular subject,

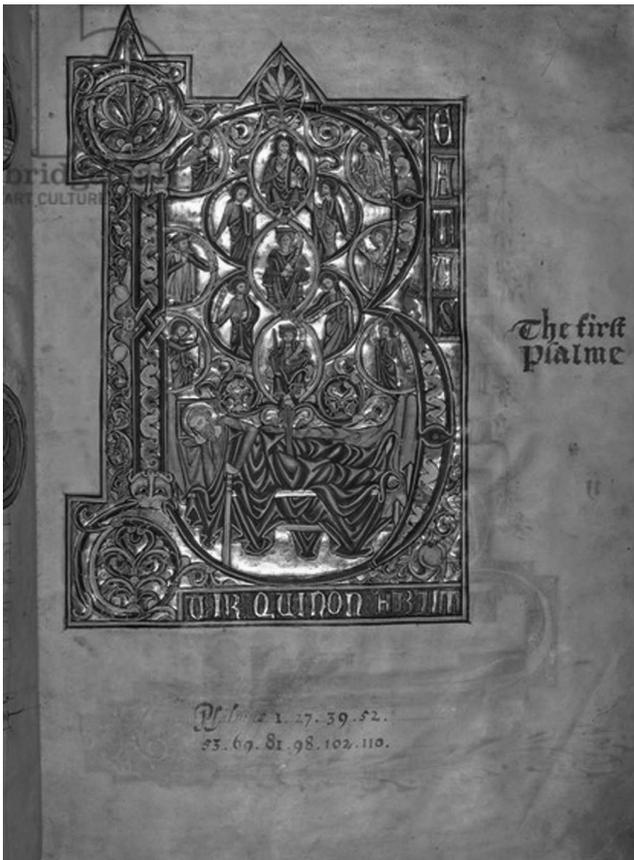


Figure 2.1 *Arbre de Jessé*. New College MS322, f7r. Psalm 1, initial B, Tree of Jesse, illustration from the “De Braile Psalter,” ca. 1250 (vellum), Brailes, William de (fl.c.1230). By permission of the Warden and Scholars of New College, Oxford/The Bridgeman Art Library.¹³

the genealogical stem grows straight up from between the legs of the sleeping Jesse, an image at first a bit embarrassing. But there are many such images, and, as Christiane Klapisch-Zuber observes, medieval artists were not unaccustomed to integrating physical sexuality and divine descent.

The branch from Jesse, the “*virga Jesse*,” which in the form of a flower portrayed Christ the king, was not, however, always represented in bloom. More crudely, medieval artists gave him for an origin the same sex as the ancestor, the sex that, placed in the middle of the body, evoked . . . the ultimate limit of canonical kinship [or consanguinity].¹⁴

The tree in the painting grows upward from the stem, through only a few branches, to end at Christ. The direct line from Jesse’s genitals links the metaphorical seed of a bloodline to the literal seed from which a tree springs. The illumination, so clearly a representation of vertical time, functions chiefly to bring together Old Testament charisma with the Christian ecclesiological mission – and, with familiar circularity, to represent Christ simultaneously as the spiritual original and the crowning achievement of a family tree contained inside the initial letter of the first Psalm.

With this kind of divine genealogical model in their back pockets, as it were, the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century humanists had a precedent for transcultural descent that incorporated long stretches of time, shifts in language, mores, and even religions. The conviction of a divine pedigree so important to the Christian myth became just as important to the kinds of transcultural descents the humanists prized – descents of poets, cities, aristocracies, and ideas.

Genealogy is the technique most often used to produce or represent vertical time. For the content of genealogy is always singular charismatic figures, or, as is the case with cultural genealogy, singular ages lost to time. Genealogy, which, in Auerbach’s terminology, is the antithesis of “horizontal” time, rescues ordinary occurrences from temporal obscurity. It remains one of the most enduring living myths of our culture – the myth that an original or founding charisma can be preserved in blood and passed down intact from generation to generation. Expanding on the “temporal extensions,” as he calls them, Auerbach shows how the vertical connection to divinity trumps the horizontal conception of time:

The horizontal, that is the temporal and causal, connection of occurrences is dissolved; the here and now is no longer a mere link in an earthly chain of events, it is simultaneously something which has always been, and which will be fulfilled in the future; and strictly, in the eyes of God, it is something eternal, something omni-temporal, something already consummate in the realm of fragmentary earthly event. *This conception of history is magnificent in its homogeneity, but it was completely alien to the mentality of classical antiquity, it annihilated that mentality down to the very structure of its language.*

(my emphasis)¹⁵

Not only does Auerbach call attention to the “magnificent” homogeneity of the Christian conception of history, in which earthly time merges with eternal time, but he also reveals the importance of simultaneity to this conception.

In a recent article on periodization, Barbara Fuchs said, “While *translatio* and *imitatio* imagine a gradual transmission over time . . . I am more interested in how emerging early modern nations negotiate the simultaneity of their cultural productions, and even more urgently, their sense of belatedness in relation not only to their classical predecessors but also to their contemporaries.”¹⁶ Fuchs’s opposition between simultaneity and belatedness, while perfectly sound in a rational universe, is counteracted in the figurative universe of transcultural genealogy. Better than any other technique, “systematic” cultural genealogy creates the art forms that fulfill the need to suppress anxiety about belatedness while fostering simultaneity of cultural production – or at least the appearance of simultaneity. Belatedness is the “corrupt and degraded” environment of the new technology. But its degradation is alleviated because, as quoted earlier, it “turns its predecessor into an art form.” In this way, cultural genealogy converts horizontal time into what McLuhan calls “extensions” of ourselves – the “personal and social consequences of any medium.” And when genealogy is the medium, McLuhan’s consequences can be seen in what Auerbach calls “temporal extensions,” for simultaneity and vertical time extend social values through the preservation of unique charismatic elements from the past. If you live the genealogical myth, you are more than you are in the present. You are belated, anachronistic, living in a degraded technological environment, *and* you are simultaneously the divine seed or spirit you inherit. Your cultural productions, indeed all forms of *poiesis* – epic poems, civic institutions, cities, and colonial ventures – share in this charismatic simultaneity.

The concept of simultaneity, however, isn’t easy to swallow. In his highly influential book on nationhood, for example, Benedict Anderson quotes the just-cited passage from Auerbach, but twists its meaning. Auerbach “rightly stresses,” according to Anderson, “that such an idea of *simultaneity* is wholly alien to our own. It views time as something close to what Benjamin calls Messianic time, a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present” (emphasis in original).¹⁷ This is directly opposed to Auerbach’s observation, which emphasizes the difference, in conceptions of time, between antiquity and Christendom – not at all between Christian thought and that of the present day. The distortion is revealing. It points toward the all-too-common misconception that the “vertical” conceptualization of time is alien to ours in all its manifestations. This is untrue. Not only does the magnificent homogeneity and “omni-temporal” quality of Christian piety continue to thrive in the present day, but other forms of temporal simultaneity retain remarkable authority in living myth. Vertical time continues to exert a hold, continues to oppress with its sovereign fiction of *figuram implere*.

Genealogical practice is probably the most visible modern experience of vertical time. Notwithstanding Rebbe Menachem Schneerson, who was the head of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement worldwide for forty years and thought by many to be the Messiah, contemporary society has become insurmountably skeptical of prefigured sacred beings manifest in daily life.¹⁸ The fulfillment of the past,

of some more acceptable form of prefiguration, has therefore become the province and foundational promise of genealogical myth. Grandfathers prefigure their grandsons and heroic ancestors prefigure aristocratic generations.

Cultural time

By the same logic of charismatic *auctoritas* and the same myth of genealogical descent, exceptional cultures of the past are seen as prefigurations to be fulfilled in the present, whence is born and kept alive the concept of cultural genealogy. Despite outright ridicule for certain outlandish descents (*viz.* the Dalai Lama as a direct descendant of Buddha) and supercilious unease with too-recent deployments of vertical time (*viz.* Joseph Smith's visit from the angel Moroni on September 21, 1823), outlandish descent narrative has by no means disappeared from current civilization. We tend, however, to consign it solely to areas where out-and-out irrationality is acceptable – mainly religion, and, sometimes, patriotic emotion. This may be a patronizing cultural tactic, but it serves an important purpose, allowing manifestly charismatic determinations to coexist with rationalized social functions.

Nevertheless, this fact of coexistence serves as proof that the concept of time so alien to the ancients isn't at all alien to us. Indeed, medieval and especially early modern concepts of time and simultaneity, *mutatis mutandis*, clearly resemble certain fixtures in our own culture. What differs, however, are the responses to time we find manifest in early modern texts. Genealogizing is chief among these responses. For early modern practitioners (and believers in it), genealogy froze time more authoritatively than it does for us. Since roughly the eighteenth century, Western culture has been skeptical of elaborate genealogical links between the present day and the mystical, exiguous past (again, with prominent, inexplicably acceptable exceptions from Brooklyn to Salt Lake City). Except in family pedigrees and polemical ethnic genealogies, we rarely find in modern times the same sort of imaginative descents we find in the medieval and early modern periods. Take, for instance, the woodcut of Elizabeth I that served as the dedication to George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesy* in 1589 (Figure 2.2).

The Italian motto, "A colei che se stessa rassomiglia & non altrui," means "To her who resembles herself and no other." In itself this motto is complimentary enough. But in fact it has clear affinities with a passage in Joachim du Bellay's *Les Antiquitez de Rome*, "Rome seule pouvoit à Rome ressembler, / Rome seule pouvoit Rome faire trembler," a poem translated by Edmund Spenser: "*Rome* onely might to *Rome* comparèd bee, / And onely *Rome* could make great *Rome* to tremble" (ll. 79–80). It seems fair to surmise that Puttenham's motto echoes du Bellay's language ("rassomiglia"/"ressembler") as well as the spirit of Spenser's translation. Puttenham adds his own stamp by translating his motto into Italian, bringing Elizabeth closer to Rome by a linguistic route. Most important, however, is the association of the Elizabethan monarchy with the authority of the Roman Empire and the Augustan peace. This association constitutes a form of cultural genealogy, a relationship characterized



Figure 2.2 George Puttenham, frontispiece to *The Arte of English Poesy* (1589).¹⁹

not so much by imitation of the past as by a felicitous descent of identical charismatic power. Yet, there is more agency than pure inheritance at work here: Puttenham chooses Rome as Elizabeth's shadow ancestor. The irony is that in claiming Elizabeth resembles no one but herself, Puttenham deliberately uses a foreign language that suggests she resembles someone – or something – else.²⁰

Hard as it might be to imagine this kind of genealogical association being persuasive in current discourse, we should not dismiss it out of hand as impossible. Many national cultures link themselves with the same exiguous kind of genealogical association to past civilizations, often straining credulity. Even the United States, supposedly a country founded on principles opposed to hereditary descent, adopted Latin tags on its Great Seal in 1782 (Figures 2.3 and 2.4).

The motto *E pluribus unum* on the front of the Seal comes from a poem thought at the time to be by Virgil, the *Moretum*: *color est e pluribus unus* (“Color comes



Figure 2.3 The Great Seal of the United States (1782).

from the mixing of many colors into one”).²¹ Like every other part of the Seal, the motto has thirteen letters, representative of the thirteen original colonies – thirteen arrows in the eagle’s claw, thirteen leaves, thirteen stripes in the escutcheon. But it is curious indeed that the designers of the Seal relied so heavily on Virgil (or pseudo-Virgil). Again, as in Elizabeth’s case, we find a nation associating itself linguistically with Rome – although it must be said that by using Italian rather than Latin, Puttenham also connects Elizabeth to the Continental models so popular in sixteenth-century England. In terms of the American effort, perhaps the Founders were intent on using Virgil simply because he added authority and a certain dignity to their cause.

But that hardly explains it. Not only does borrowing from Augustus’s poet inevitably link the thirteen colonies to the Roman imperial state, but the *Moretum* itself presents some oddities of its own. The poem’s title, sometimes translated



Figure 2.4 The Great Seal of the United States (1782).

as “Salad,” actually means “garlic and cheese spread,” an appropriate topic for what is largely a georgic idyll. Imitated in later Latin poetry for its meter, which showed the rhetoricians’ influence on poetry, the *Moretum* consists of a step-by-step recipe for making this particular condiment.²² The key phrase for the Great Seal appears in a long passage on the blending of herbs with garlic:

dextera pistillo primum flagrantia mollit
 alia, tum pariter mixto terit omnia suco.
 it manus in gyrum: paulatim singula vires
 deperdunt proprias; *color est e pluribus unus*,
 nec totus viridis, quia lactea frustra repugnant,
 nec de lacte nitens, quia tot variatur ab herbis.
 (101–06; my emphasis)

with his right
 The reeking garlic with the pestle breaks,
 Then everything he equally doth rub
 I' th' mingled juice. His hand in circles moves:
 Till by degrees they one by one do lose
 Their proper powers, *and out of many comes*
A single color, not entirely green, because the milky fragments this forbid,
 Nor showing white as from the milk but because
 That color's altered by so many herbs.

(150–59)²³

Bizarre as it may seem, the notion of the United States as a huge salad dressing or herb and garlic spread actually makes sense in terms of what has so often been called the melting pot. Instead of a melting pot, the *Moretum* invokes the mortar and pestle, mixing the green herbs and the white garlic until out of many colors comes one – *e pluribus unus*. Not a bad image at all for the American experiment – but do modern Americans realize that their ponderous motto derives from a description of a salad dressing? Did the Founders have a sense of humor that has been lost in the not untypical self-inflation of nationhood? Or is the motto yet one more example of the wholesale evisceration of ancient values and meaning in the pursuit of new authority with a venerable pedigree? If so, and the salad dressing joke is lost – as it obviously is in a population who not only wouldn't know the original verses, but wouldn't be able to explain why *unus* became *unum* – if the joke is lost, then what is left is a prime case of cultural genealogy. Instead of literary allusion, we have the faux authority of an imperial language, Latin, attached to the creative genealogical endeavor of wresting the words themselves from the context of their original meaning and adding contemporary value to them.

As Djelal Kadir has shown with meticulous insight, one can chart developments in the American value system by following its shifting relationship to the Latin phrase over the course of American history.²⁴ His analysis is worth considering at some length. It is not “fortuitous,” he begins, “that the Virgilian phrase should re-emerge as the national motto emblematic of the incipient United States of America at a time when the newly-minted nation projected itself into future history by invoking mimetically the Republican Rome of Virgil's era” (2). Kadir's aim in his address is to remind “all Americanists that the significance of *e pluribus unum* has never been limited to local or parochial issues, but has invariably signaled an international complexity whose transnational dynamics have often been occluded behind the veil of integration, assimilation, and acculturation” (3). Although Kadir is concerned in particular with the misleading connotations of the Latin phrase, he might also have said that the deployment of Latin per se, the invocation of the imperial language, did equally as much to mask local and parochial issues. But this occurs as a part of the genealogical masquerade, behind a veil of transcultural assimilation.

Kadir goes on later in his analysis to point out that “Virgil’s poem, as a classic, has proved its enduring relevance in offering the founding fathers of the new U.S. republic a signifying enablement” (18). Although the question of whether the *Moretum* is even Virgil’s remains unanswered – most scholars tend to say it isn’t – Kadir (who follows Rushton Fairclough, the early Loeb translator, in ascribing the poem to Virgil) is rightly more concerned with the fact that the Founding Fathers believed it to be a georgic idyll by the author of the *Georgics*.²⁵ The claim to *au-toritas* and the golden-age republicanism of Augustus would have supplied what Kadir calls the “signifying enablement.” As noted, the motto is drawn from a passage on the crushing of garlic. But the poem is not merely a recipe for salad dressing. It is in fact the description of a hardscrabble rustic morning during which the farmer, Symilus, starts a fire, draws out some grain, and mills it himself. Having done this, and before he goes to the garden to choose the herbs for the salad mix, he calls to Scybale, his African housekeeper:

interdum clamat Scybalen. erat unica custos,
Afra genus, tota patriam testante figura,
torta comam labroque tumens et fusca colore,
pectore lata, jacens mammis, compressor alvo,
cruribus exilis, spatiosa prodiga planta.

[ll.31–35]

And meanwhile calls on Scybale *to rise*.
His solitary housekeeper was she,
Her nationality was African,
And all her figure proves her native land.
Her hair was curly, thick her lips, and dark
Her colour, wide was she across the chest
With hanging breasts, her belly more compressed,
With slender legs and large and spreading foot.

[ll.46–54]²⁶

The ominousness of this description and of the domestic arrangement lurking behind the U.S. nationalistic motto can’t be ignored. Few people beside scholars may be aware of the full narrative of the *Moretum*, but the Founders must have known the passage. As Kadir suggests in a superbly audacious reading, the rustic farmer Symilus’s African housekeeper might well be his freed African slave and also, perhaps, his female companion: “Behind the harmonious chromatics of its georgic idyll, we should be able to discern the asymmetry in the convivial *métissage* depicted in the poem. We now know, or should know, that this is the inevitable asymmetry that characterizes even the most ideal processes of integration between, or among, human subjects, especially when the differential marks of their heterogeneity entail gender, ethnicity, race, class, collective history, and personal biography” (18–19). There’s no explicit evidence of manumission in the poem, but I won’t quibble – Scybale, the housekeeper (*custos*), though she seems

to have a subordinate position in the household, doesn't appear to be a slave. Her presence, however, adds unexpected polysemy to the pseudo-Virgilian verse.

Still, I think we have to be careful not to find ourselves killing a butterfly with a blunderbuss. Sophisticated, and indeed brilliant, as Kadir's connections are, I have some reservations about the conclusions he reaches, especially in regard to everyday encounters with the phrase *e pluribus unum*. If people don't know the history of the term, don't even know it comes from a poem, how can all the subtle associations of masters and manumitted slaves, Roman imperialism and American expansionism have any actual effect on their thinking? I won't deny the intellectual value of Kadir's analysis, nor am I in a position to reject the importance of a bit of wool-gathering in pursuit of raising consciousness among scholars. But most people encounter *e pluribus unum* as no more than a vague linguistic association with ancient Rome. All that matters is the *auctoritas* – the sense of a charismatically enhanced descent of power – transmitted intact down the generations.

Cultural genealogy is patently an exercise in what Kadir calls "harmonious chromatics," and its enabling fiction is intended to suppress evidence of asymmetry between cultures. Certainly many of the same complicities unveiled in a full reading of the *Moretum* can be found in narratives of transcultural descent. But the chief aim of those descents, the chief objective of cultural genealogy, is to replace heterogeneity with the illusion of integration and acculturation. It's doubtful the Founding Fathers cherry-picked the term *e pluribus unum* from Virgil's poem so that the social mores of the young republic could resonate with the dubious domestic arrangement of Symilus and Scybale. To do that would be to lose their uniqueness in the polysemous slough of horizontal time. They probably had completely different ambitions for the phrase – ambitions that catapulted the new nation into the realm of vertical time. Linguistically petrified as a motto, *e pluribus unum* would be expected to act, not as an instigation to poetic interpretation, but as a genealogical marker, a bearer of undefined Roman *auctoritas*. It would be meant to arrest physical time and foster the essentially baseless conviction that this belated, utterly different citizenry of the United States could tap into vertical time and inherit an original charismatic authority. At bottom, the promise of *e pluribus unum* is not merely the *translatio* of the phrase itself, but more importantly the remaking of the original Roman value in the image of the present. This is the lie of descent.²⁷

Chips of Messianic time

In Renaissance writing the conviction of false cultural descent was almost a prerequisite of social posturing. For example, many Romance-language nations, as a means of engaging the very idea of nationhood, traced their origins to Troy.²⁸ Even England, by a strained genealogical route, "discovered" a family tree leading from Aeneas to his great-grandson Brutus who traveled far north and took possession of the isles. Heather James cites Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of England* as the source of a long and distinguished royal lineage: "Adam, Noah, Priam, Aeneas, Ascanius, Silvius, Brutus. In an adventure narratively structured on Vergil's Aeneas' journey from Troy to Rome, Brutus traveled

from Rome to England to establish Troynovant, later named London.”²⁹ Richard Waswo has traced the descent of the Trojan diaspora through medieval sources such as Fredegar and the *Historia Brittonum*, “traditionally attributed to Nennius, the name by which it was often known.”³⁰

With a slight linguistic transformation of *u* to *i* in Brutus’s name, Britain was born. It is difficult not to sound facetious when presented with the more extreme genealogies of the Renaissance. Nevertheless, the stretch of imagination needed to reconcile the vast differences between Trojan/Roman culture and sixteenth-century British culture is all but staggering. What, for example, were the Elizabethans to gain in linking themselves to Priam’s fallen race? Waswo asks the pertinent question: “What kind of a story is this, that selects a cultural origin that is always already destroyed?”³¹ Why bother aligning a Christian culture with an admittedly heathen one characterized by the celebrated transmission of Aeneas’s religion in the physical statuary of his Penates? The usual answer to these questions is that Britain and other nations were driven by the need to legitimize their authority. The impregnable fortress of genealogical legitimacy made an ideal analog for cultural legitimacy. Although there were many idiosyncratic versions, the general pattern of *translatio imperii* was a seamless latching-on of present cultural authority to powerful and long-enduring dynasties of the past. But, as I’ve already noted, little of a tangible nature and few undistorted social values survived this supposedly seamless transmission. Waswo emphasizes the metaphorical character of the fiction: “What the Trojans are bringing to the west is nothing less than civilization itself,” he observes. “The ‘empire without end’ (*Aeneid* 1.279) that Jupiter has given to the Roman heirs of the wandering Trojans includes the transplantation of all arts and sciences, the bringing of a total culture. Celebrated in the Middle Ages as the *translatio imperii et studii*, this ‘transmission of empire and learning’ is the central vision that the occident has of itself.”³² This is difficult to dispute. It may be true that the *translatio imperii et studii* is what Waswo terms the “central vision that the occident has of itself.” But genealogical delusion mars the vision. Of transferrable ancient power, only a charismatic essence remained, an essence comparable to that passed down intact in all genealogical fictions from the most prosaic family descents to the most elevated aristocratic or “holy” ones.

For this reason cultural genealogy succeeded so impressively. Its fundamental premise was shared by all social strata, which is in itself ironic, considering the cultural elitism we often associate with High Renaissance values. But the notion of transcultural descent tapped into the unshakeable belief that a supernatural element could transcend the normal limitations of time and survive from generation to generation, up until the present day. Every burgher, every farmer, every patriarch and matriarch believed this fiction, and ascribed to the supernatural element a sort of holiness powerful and knowing enough to circumnavigate the shoals of paganism and arrive on the safe shore of modern Christianity (although Protestant and Catholic genealogies differed). Consequently, the holiness of genealogical descent that infused every family narrative also infused the broader fiction of cultural descent. This is the true *translatio*, and it alone provides the basis for inherited cultural legitimacy.

Fictions of transcultural descent in the early modern period reflect an equivocal attitude toward progress. The supersession of pagan beliefs is often undercut by the re-assumption, or reinvention, of classical virtues in the discourse of vertical time. For this reason the genealogical formula came in handy for humanists. Conventionally, genealogy didn't imply progress from barbaric to civilized or antiquated to modern, but, instead, a sense of striving to recapture the power of an original charismatic figure whose "blood" was preserved – often in watered-down form – in the current generation. This typical scenario applied well to the fictions of cultural genealogy. With the help of the new technological medium of systematic genealogy, present cultural conditions were made to seem barbaric while idealizations of past cultures were raised to the status of charismatically endowed blood kin. All that was needed was to fashion pedigrees to fit the newly created ideal descents. Toward this end, as I hope we've already begun to see, creative distortions multiplied in such hyperbolically optimistic discourse as to strain not only our present-day credulity, but also our credulity of *their* credulity.

Creative distortions as wild as the ones I'm referring to no longer occur in serious descriptions of culture descent. The deliberate force of revaluation, the spuriousness and the inevitable tendentiousness – none of these pass our modern test of credibility. According to Marie Tanner, whose magisterial *The Last Descendant of Aeneas* I cited in the introduction, "Genealogical mythmaking and prophecy, two disciplines so remote from twentieth-century rational thought as to be disregarded in modern historical studies, went hand in hand to sustain the emperor's mythic image."³³ She is referring to the Habsburgs and the establishment of the Holy Roman Empire, but her point can be applied to all of intellectual culture from the mid-fourteenth century through the seventeenth. The sheer oddity of the genealogical mythmaking of the period has, I think, allowed scholars to shunt the genealogies to the margins of intellectual history.³⁴ Prophecy has suffered a similar fate, but insofar as religious belief remains strong in the twenty-first century, it would seem that tolerance for prophetic utterances has outstripped patience with exotic genealogical myths (except, predictably, where the genealogical myths sustain religions).

In a chapter titled "Mythic Genealogy," Tanner isolates the remarkable feature of the period's genealogizing: "To support him in his global ambitions to rule as priest and king, Maximilian burst the boundaries of traditional ancestral stalking. In construing a mythical past, Maximilian concentrated on a single idea: the widening of the net of races that converged in his pedigree. Cultural borders offered no barrier to the medley of figures that were swept into the common genealogical root."³⁵ The collapsing of borders and the transcultural flamboyance of Maximilian's genealogy characterize all mythic genealogizing. One might even call it a practical necessity. As Tanner points out, however, Maximilian seems to have caught the tone of the period in his ambitions:

The archeological intensity with which he pursued this ancestral quest set Maximilian apart from his predecessors, as historians *were sent throughout Europe to document his legendary past*. The most renowned humanists of the

Northern Renaissance, including Johann Aventinus, Heinrich Bebel, Conrad Celtis, Hieronymus Gebwiler, Wolfgang Lazius, Jacob Mennel, Johannes Naucler, Conrad Pettinger, Johann Stabius, and Franciscus Irenicus, give some indication of the prodigious talent devoted to these endeavors.

(my emphasis)³⁶

The phrase I italicized should underscore the utterly alien nature of Maximilian's quest for a genealogy – alien, that is, to our own competing ideas of history and imaginative writing. Not only is Tanner's list of "prodigious talent" remarkable in itself, but the notion that so many northern humanists should be combing European vaults to find evidence of Maximilian's pedigree seems absurd when we see the supposed genealogical facts they discover. "Among the peculiar results of this scholarly speculation," Tanner reports, "was Irenicus's assertion that the Argonauts sojourned in Germany. . . . Gebwiler too contributed arcana. He revealed that the hidden meaning informing the familiar bifrontal image of Janus was his dual nature as Noah-Janus." The already familiar Noah-Janus connection had a pedigree of its own, which I will discuss later. But here I simply want to ask why, given the highly speculative nature of these supposed antecedents, scholars bothered to search for sources at all. To our ear, the genealogies read as fictions, pure and simple. To give them the weight of credibility one normally gives to historical research is impossible, even laughable. As Tanner concludes:

All of these humanists lent their authority to the reconciling of indigenous, classical, and biblical myths of origin in Maximilian's pedigree. Among his ancestors were Jewish kings and prophets, Greek and Egyptian demigods, Roman divinities and Christian saints, Trojan heroes and their historical progeny among the Frankish emperors; thus Saturn and Osiris, Hector and Priam, Noah and Christ, Clovis and Charlemagne sprout from various branches of the Hapsburg family tree.

Nor did Maximilian's genealogists neglect church history: "By the end of his life, Maximilian would claim more than a hundred martyrs, popes, and saints as his direct kin."

The breadth and trajectory of this royal genealogy serve as a valuable model for the fundamental ideal of cultural genealogy. Referring to the humanists' colloca-tion, Tanner observes that "As random as the medley may appear, this crisscrossing of heritages was not a haphazard proposition, for an iron-clad logic underlay the construction of Maximilian's ancestral cult. . . . Maximilian's legitimacy to rule the Roman imperium was made evident by the Trojan ancestry that descended to him from Priam and Hector through his progenitors among the kings and caesars of ancient and medieval Rome. A parallel Greek ancestry sustained Maximilian's right to the Eastern Empire. The tracing of his parentage to Noah – successfully defended by the theological faculty in Vienna – sustained his right to succeed as the king of Jerusalem."³⁷

“Crisscrossing” is an excellent word for the transcultural borrowings Maximilian’s humanists made. A similar form of crisscrossing is vital to the building of cultural genealogies. Legitimization is the key to both forms of descent, but the rhetorical aims of cultural genealogy differ from that of blood descent. Whereas even royal descents with their outlandish Mesopotamian origins concentrate on legitimizing a single person or family, cultural genealogy seeks (or asserts) the *auctoritas* to claim descent from a prior civilization. Just as cultural genealogy borrows simultaneously from the concept of organic culture and rationally projected “civilization,” so it also borrows from the dual concept of genealogy as a static reality waiting to be recorded and genealogy as a myth-in-progress. Consequently, the various manifestations of intellectual culture, such as poetry, painting, history, architecture, law, manners, philosophy, even love, claim to trace their origins to a supposedly already legitimized past.

As is obvious in the rhetoric of cultural genealogies, however, these origins are calculated and manufactured by the present, just as Maximilian’s wildly fictionalized antecedents were created by his tame humanists to satisfy the requirements of proving the authenticity of a royal descent from Roman, Greek, and Hebrew kings.

This kind of genealogical mythmaking and prophecy may be remote from modern twentieth-century rational thought, as Marie Tanner maintains. For instance, despite the fanciful city seal still in use in New York (Figure 2.5), a history of the city that included an introductory descent narrative leading back to Troy or Attila the Hun, or a Lenape chieftain for that matter, would probably be laughable today.³⁸ Yet archival history and empirical proofs don’t entirely let us off the hook. If anything, they tend to mask the parallels between our sense of cultural genealogy and that of early modern discourse.

It is not so much that the concepts of time and simultaneity have changed in our day as that the fashionable methodologies for expressing those concepts have been strictly cordoned off. In the arts, where it all began – that is, in the *studia humanitatis*, which added poetry and history to the medieval *trivium* of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic – genealogy no longer holds sway. Yet it is alive and well – and often just as bizarre in its claims of *auctoritas* – in other sectors of the public sphere. The same kind of genealogizing that would be scorned as irrational and downright silly if engaged in by, say, a modern historian as a form of proof, can still do the work of living myth in the public sphere. For example, the most irrational (and apparently unimpeachable) genealogizing practices continue to hold sway in religious contexts (*viz.* Jesus’ descent from David in Matthew 1; or the selection of the Dalai Lama) and in ethnic-political claims (*viz.* the descent of Serbian rights from the ancient battle of Kosovo; or the Israeli claim that the Hebrew Bible gives them the right to particular lands and borders). All these are forms of cultural genealogy, imbued with the conviction that a later culture – no matter how separate in chronological time or different in daily practices – inherits *intact* the original charismatic elements of a messiah, a tribe, a national pedigree, or a god. There can be no rational explanation for this – that is, once we speak rationally about this kind of descent, we trivialize it and our explanations (even if they are meant to support it) sound irrelevant.

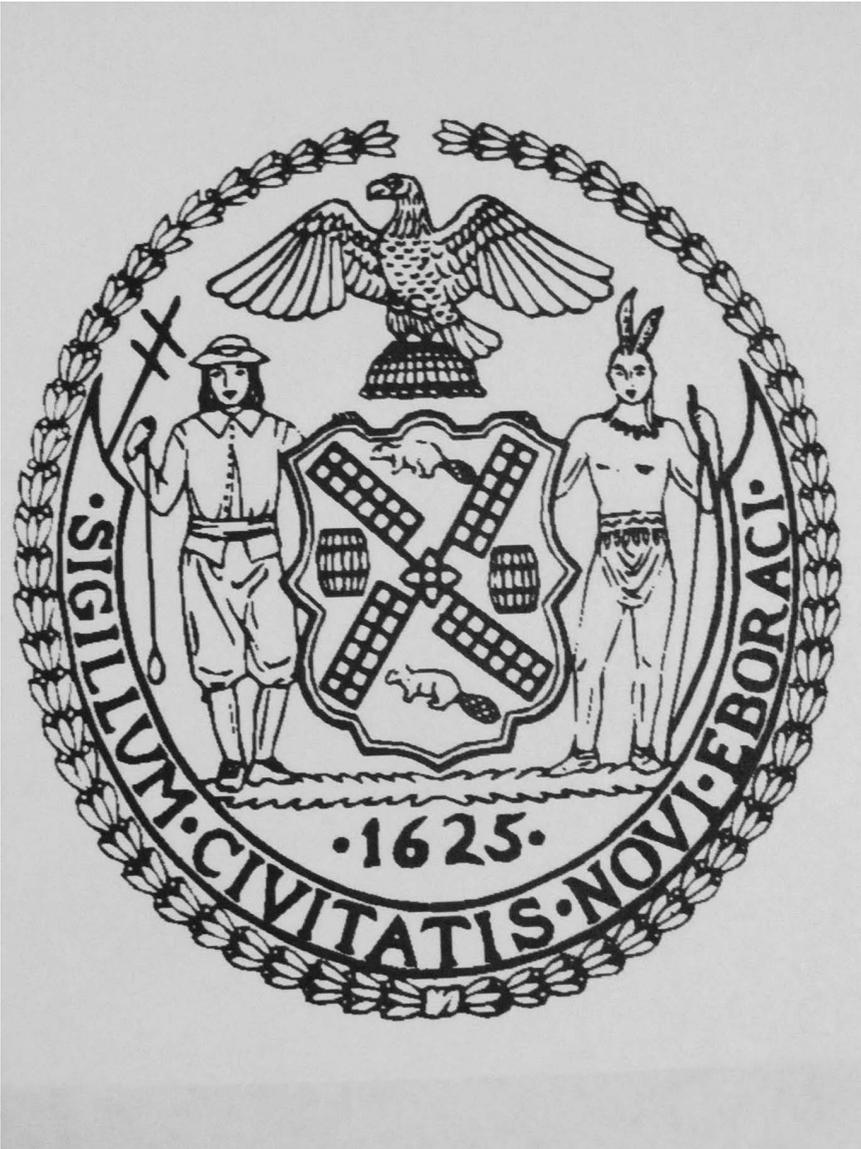


Figure 2.5 The New York City seal, with Latin motto.

Let me return briefly to Walter Benjamin's notion of Messianic time, cited by Anderson as akin to "simultaneity" and alien to our own notion of time. The term appears in Benjamin's "Theses of the Philosophy of History," a series of brief, aphoristic paragraphs collected in *Illuminations* (a posthumous compilation by Hannah Arendt). Benjamin returns several times to this notion of Messianic time

in his “Theses,” although, *pace* Anderson, he never quite rejects the notion as alien to current ways of thinking about time and history. On the contrary, he seems to say that a true understanding of history – best sought, by his lights, through historical materialism – must include the recognition of Messianic time and human redemption. For example:

The past carries with it the temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply. Historical materialists are aware of that.³⁹

It is difficult to tell in this passage exactly where rationality leaves off and a kind of spiritualism begins. The key phrases for the present discussion, the “secret agreement between past and present generations” and the “*weak* Messianic power,” have not gone unnoticed among critics, although there is little consensus in regard to Benjamin’s sources or even his intended meaning. For instance, in a comparison of German philosopher Hermann Cohen to Benjamin, Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky maintains that “[I]n contrast to Cohen, who could conceive of history exclusively as the generation of the future and as an infinite approach to the idea of humanity, Benjamin realigns the representation of redemption from the future toward the past.”⁴⁰ Despite this difference in notions of redemption, however, Benjamin’s “*weak* Messianic power” perhaps originates in Cohen. According to Deuber-Mankowsky, we find in Cohen’s *Ethics of Pure Will* (1904), which Benjamin might well have known, a “concept of messianism that draws its power from the recognition of human weakness. Redemption means in this context not redemption from weakness but transformation of weakness into strength.”⁴¹

Still, even if we accept this characterization of Benjamin’s Messianism, we should notice the difference between the agency required to effect transformation and the passivity of Cohen’s Pauline sense of redemption. This is important in the context of cultural genealogy because the selecting of past ancestors and the *transformation* of their values becomes, in the early modern era, self-transformation and self-redemption. Through active participation in cultural genealogy, authors (and readers too) help to transform the values of their society and redeem themselves and their fellow citizens by connecting the present to the past. The “secret agreement between past and present generations,” of which Benjamin speaks, closely resembles the idealized fiction of cultural genealogy. This same sense of simultaneity accompanies – and, indeed, structures – transcultural descent narratives. The “*weak* Messianic power” is manifestly charismatic, a supra-worldly link to the past that fulfills the promise of redemption – *Annuit Coeptis*, “he approves our undertakings,” as in the motto on the back of the Great Seal of the United States (see Figure 2.4). According to Benjamin, the simultaneity of time inherent in the “secret agreement” is familiar, even necessary, to modern thought, not at all alien to it. He says that historians should beware of causal connections

and “[stop] telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary.”⁴² Instead, he recommends that the historian “[grasp] the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the ‘time of the now’ which is shot through with chips of Messianic time.”⁴³

We might interpret the metaphor “chips of Messianic time” in many ways, but the idea of idealized art forms created by a new technology out of its predecessor provides an excellent analogy. The pretext for cultural genealogy is the selection of important values from past civilizations, values that, according to the familiar conceit, have been lost through the ignorance and neglect of intervening dark ages. These “lost” values represent the chips of Messianic time so necessary to continued divine endowment in the present. Genealogical technology recues the lost items, creating and at the same time preserving the charismatic ideals of the past – usually by pretending to suppress the immediate past. This pattern is as true of Petrarch’s stigmatization of the medieval period as a dark age as it is of William Tyndale’s characterization of a corrupt, ignorant clergy and their blind flock unable to read the Bible in Latin, Greek, or Hebrew.⁴⁴ Just as Petrarch invented – again, with a soupçon of the original sense of *inventio*, “discovery” – a set of origins for his cultural values by reaching back to Ennius and Virgil, so Tyndale and other Protestant reformers claimed to discover the very values that they promoted in the early church, particularly in Pauline ecclesiology and in the vernacular accessibility of Paul’s message.

The inheritance of cultural values from the distant past depends on a manufactured discontinuity with the more recent past. Since it is impossible (or awkward) to have two origins, establishing a continuity with defunct, alien cultures required the coeval establishment of *discontinuity* with local, chronologically proximate culture. Such contrived discontinuity, in that it cannot be proved by biological genealogy, relies on the remythicizations of cultural genealogy for its bona fides. Thus the humanists of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries emphasized, and largely invented, discontinuity between themselves and what was otherwise the continuum with medieval culture. At the same time they also invented a moral-philosophical-literary continuum between themselves and ancient Roman and Greek civilization, imputing a *genealogical* relationship where only a voluntary one existed. This kind of contrived discontinuity leads inevitably to a norming, or reformulation, of values according to contemporary mores – again, all values are local. The humanists were distinctly more purposive in this regard than medieval writers. Yet it would not do to suggest that medieval genealogists of culture were above exchanging actual or likely progenitors for more exotic and charismatic figures from the past. The difference is in the unsystematic nature of medieval genealogies in contrast to the highly deliberate – one might almost say conspiratorially agreed-upon – discontinuities of post-Petrarchan writers.

A great deal has been written about the Renaissance idea of the “dark ages” and about the self-serving quality of that term.⁴⁵ Chris Wickham recently reminded us that “[i]t was Renaissance scholars themselves who invented this image,” a fact visible in the outlandish genealogical leapfrogging meant to prove the “modern” intellectual difference from medieval writers.⁴⁶ Certainly the leapfrogging helped

the humanists to activate and empower the new medium of cultural genealogy, which in turn heightened the illusion of cultural affinities with antiquity. And the sheer industry of their achievement is still admired by anyone who takes the time to unravel the genealogical message. But no one has been fooled for a long time. The periodization of the Renaissance is old news, as is the myth of discontinuity perpetuated by humanist authors.

Yet, surprisingly little has been said about the method by which these authors entrenched a myth of renewed connection to the ancient past. The false continuity, while noted by scholars – if somewhat superciliously now – has failed to inspire as much curiosity (or indignation) as the false discontinuity. As a consequence, the genealogical character of this discontinuous inheritance has been neglected, as has been the paradox manifest in a juxtaposition of agency and inheritance. Because, as Hyde notes, genealogies *create* an origin rather than derive from it, we must recognize in the manufactured descents of early modern culture the reinvestment of contemporary values in ancient texts, gods, religions, and even languages. Moreover, it would be mistaken to deny the kaleidoscopic multicausality that produced this reinvestment of values. Philippa Berry has called attention to the puritanical anxiety “concerning interest in . . . archaic origin,” an anxiety caused largely by the “disturbing polysemy” of classical tradition.⁴⁷

In fact, there was little need for this anxiety. The wholesale reinvestment of values tended to neutralize the threat, even if, at times, Renaissance churchmen attempted to censure ancient texts for their corrupting influence. In truth, the sad and revealing lesson of what Jean Seznec memorably called “the survival of the pagan gods” is that they didn’t really survive at all, or they survived in name only, which almost seems worse than not surviving at all. The humanists and other early modern authors hollowed out the ancient gods, emptied them of their meaning and value and power. This act too had a kind of simultaneity to it. Renaissance intellectuals revived ancient civilization at the same time that they eviscerated it. They really had no choice, since local values, to retain their integrity and force in a culture, can only borrow from the past by transforming it. As I said earlier, the contemporary social sphere limits the assimilation of past ideals through a matrix of ritual practice, religion, education, and economy. Although it might seem that some abstractions, such as honor or mercy, retain their meaning across long epochs, in reality we cannot transfer or translate such values without wresting them violently from the discourse of their time and reconstructing them with the building-blocks of the present day. In many cases, at least in early modern thought, this reconstruction has genealogical contours, legitimizing the descent of an idea from a culture ancient not only in time but also in almost every other conceivable way.

Notes

- 1 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Critical edition, ed. W. Terrence Gordon (Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press, 2003) 19.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 13. The quotation above is from the same paragraph.
- 3 Arthur F. Kinney, *Continental Humanist Poetics: Studies in Erasmus, Castiglione, Marguerite de Navarre, Rabelais, and Cervantes* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts

- Press, 1989) 308. See Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983) 174–75.
- 4 Kinney, *Continental Humanist Poetics*.
 - 5 Thomas Hyde, “Boccaccio: The Genealogies of Myth,” *PMLA* 100 (1985): 743; 734. For a detailed, if older, discussion of “Boccaccio’s trees” as “the earliest secular genealogical trees properly so called” and their origins in the “*arbor iuris* of medieval law,” see Ernest Hatch Wilkins, “The Genealogy of the Genealogical Trees of the ‘Genealogia Deorum,’” *Modern Philology* 23 (1925): 61–65.
 - 6 Giambattista Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991) 116. Vico mentions the phrase from Tacitus on 117.
 - 7 *Ibid.*, 118; see also 128.
 - 8 See my *Charisma and Myth* (London: Continuum, 2010) esp. 1–2, and chapter 2.
 - 9 In Greenblatt, *Cultural Mobility*, 26.
 - 10 *Ibid.*, 26–27.
 - 11 Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971) 73–74.
 - 12 In Chapter 1 of *Unearthing the Past*, Leonard Barkan has a section called “Vertical History” in which he suggests that “Dante and Petrarch point to many facets of Rome’s infinite regress from reality into symbol . . . the Rome of Nicholas V, who imports Fra Angelico, or of Sixtus IV, who imports Botticelli, or of Julius II, who imports Raphael and Michelangelo, uses its cultural force not so much to build a new reality as to realize an old myth” (*Unearthing the Past: Archaeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999] 20). Although Barkan is concerned chiefly with what he calls “protoarchaeology” and the *mundus significans* created by the discovery of statues during the Renaissance, his notion of a pattern of “infinite regress” resonates as a kind of backward formation with prefiguration and vertical time. Barkan doesn’t cite Auerbach (or Anderson) in his chapter.
 - 13 This image also appears in Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *L’Arbre des Familles* (Paris: Éditions de La Martinière, 2003) 96–97, where it is labeled “*Arbre de Jesse*, miniature, initiale B, vers 1240–1250, extraite d’un psautier du a l’atelier de Brailles.”
 - 14 *Ibid.*, 96: “Le rameau de Jessé, la ‘virga Jesse,’ qui en guise de fleur portrait le Christ roi, n’a pourtant pas toujours été représenté en jaillissant. Plus crûment, les artistes médiévaux lui ont donné pour origine le sexe même de l’ancêtre, ce sexe qui, placé au milieu du corps, évoquait . . . limite ultime de la parenté canonique.” The translation is mine.
 - 15 Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 74.
 - 16 Barbara Fuchs, “Golden Ages and Golden Hinds; or, Periodizing Spain and England,” *PMLA* 127 (2012): 322.
 - 17 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised edition (London: Verso, 1991) 24.
 - 18 Menachem Schneerson (1902–94) had extraordinary influence both within his close-knit Jewish community and among world leaders. Politicians, entertainment figures, even religious leaders traveled great distances for an audience with him in Brooklyn, presumably to attain his blessing. Many Lubavitchers, both during his life and after his death, considered Rebbe Schneerson the Hebrew “Moshiach” and continue to await his return. Vans can be seen parked throughout New York City with the message, in Hebrew and in English, “He will return” painted on their sides. It must be added, however, that not all Hassidim have accepted the Messianic contentions.
 - 19 See George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesy*, A critical edition, eds. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007). The editors suggest that “the image may well have been created for the *Art*” (92) and also list other appearances of it.

- 20 One can't help but recall Milton's famous line, "Things yet unattempted in prose or rhyme" (*Paradise Lost*, l.16), a translation of Ludovico Ariosto's line at the beginning of the *Orlando Furioso*: "Cosa non detta in prosa mai, ne in rima" (Canto I.2.2).
- 21 Scholars have suggested the resemblance to a slightly different phrase in Heraclitus's tenth fragment, but the *Moretum* seems the more likely direct source.
- 22 Cf. F.J.E. Raby, *A History of Secular Latin Poetry in the Middle Ages*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934) 1; 28.
- 23 Virgil, *The Minor Poems of Vergil*, trans. Joseph J. Mooney (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, 1916). See p. 100 for the Latin; p. 42 for the English, which is a metrical translation. The text is a facsimile reproduction of Mooney's original publication.
- 24 The following material is drawn from an address Kadir gave at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research at Bielefeld University, Germany, in 2008. The full text appears in PDF format on his website: http://psu-us.academia.edu/DjelalKadir/Papers/1379490/Imperial_Calculus_E_Pluribus_Unum.
- 25 For a definitive modern edition of the poem, with commentary, see Alessandro Perutelli [P. Vergili Maronis], *Moretum* (Pisa: Giardini [Biblioteca di Studi Antichi], 1983; cf. also the review of Perutelli by F.R.D. Goodyear, who points out that "few would dispute the view, adopted by Perutelli, that the *Moretum* is somewhat later than Ovid" (*The Classical Review*, New Series 37 [1987]): 305.
- 26 Virgil, *The Minor Poems of Virgil*, 101; 44.
- 27 On the back of the Seal we find two more Latin tags: *Annuet Coeptis* and *Novus Ordo Seclorum*. The first means "He approves (or has approved) [our] undertaking(s)" and the second "New Order of the Ages." Why do such a thing? Why associate a burgeoning national consciousness with ancient Rome? It seems odd that, even if Latin were meant to give more dignity to the motto, *dignitas romanorum* was hardly the order of the day, not to mention the negative connotations of aligning a new country with a fallen empire. Not until 1956 did the U.S. Congress make it official that the national motto should be "In God We Trust," rather than the unofficial *E pluribus unum* (although even as an "unofficial" motto, the Latin phrase began appearing on coins in the late eighteenth century).
- 28 See *Fantasies of Troy: Classical Tales and the Social Imaginary in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Stephen David Powell and Alan Shepard (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2004).
- 29 Heather James, *Shakespeare's Troy: Drama, Politics, and the Translation of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 15. Cf. also 225fn14.
- 30 Richard Waswo, "Our Ancestors, the Trojans: Inventing Cultural Identity in the Middle Ages," *Exemplaria* 7 (1995): 269, 274. At the beginning of the first chapter of his book on Virgil's *Aeneid* as the founding epic of Western civilization – in which he details the proliferation and abuse of the metaphor of the arrival of "culture-bringers" – Waswo provides an excellent synopsis of the (digested) Troy legend. See *The Founding Legend of Western Civilization*, esp. 1–3, and chapter 9, "Everybody's Genealogy."
- 31 *Ibid.*, *The Founding Legend*, 2.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 Marie Tanner, *The Last Descendant of Aeneas: The Hapsburgs and the Mythic Image of the Emperor* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 119.
- 34 See, e.g., Marie Tanner, *The Last Descendant of Aeneas*; Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *L'Ombre Des Ancêtres: Essai sur L'Imaginaire Médiéval de la Parenté* (Paris: Fayard, 2000); Roberto Bizzochi, *Genealogie incredibili: Scritti di storia nell'Europa moderna* (Bologna: Mulino, 1995). Bizzochi lists scores of genealogies of elite families, such as the Estes, detailing the usual descents from Troy and Noah, et al., but also showing how the historiography of Italy is built on these "incredible genealogies." Coincidentally, he also points to one example, that of Annoio di Viterbo in 1499, whose genealogical discourse he calls "systematic" ("Qui il discorso genealogico ha un respiro più ampio e sistematico che in Ceccarelli" [27]). Bizzochi cites Walter Stephens, *Giants*

- in *Those Days: Folklore, Ancient History, and Nationalism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989).
- 35 Tanner, *The Last Descendant of Aeneas*, 101.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 103. Quotations in the rest of the paragraph are taken from the same page.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 103–04.
- 38 The Latin simply means “Seal of the City of New York.” Eboracum is the Roman name for York. The link to Roman culture is perhaps less puzzling here than in other contexts. First designed in the seventeenth century, the seal in fact had a crown in the crest. The American Bald Eagle wasn’t added until 1784. But even at the city’s founding, the parallel between the Dutch settler and the Lenape brave is, from our jaded postcolonial perspective, mordantly ironic.
- 39 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) 254.
- 40 Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky, “The Image of Happiness We Harbor: The Messianic Power of Weakness in Cohen, Benjamin, and Paul,” *New German Critique* 105 (2008): 69.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 57.
- 42 Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 263.
- 43 *Ibid.*
- 44 Cf. William Tyndale, *A Pathway into the Holy Scriptures*, “And our great pillars of the holy church, who have nailed a veil of false glosses on Moses’ face to corrupt the true understanding of his law, cannot come in. And therefore they bark and the scripture makes heretics. And it is not possible for them to understand the scripture in English because they do not understand it in Latin.”
- 45 The bibliography on this subject is extensive, much of it familiar. For a basic background in the scholarship, see, e.g., Theodor E. Mommsen, “Petrarch’s Concept of the Dark Ages,” *Speculum* 17 (1942): 226–42; Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renaissances in Western Art* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972); Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982); Walter Ullmann, “The Medieval Origins of the Renaissance,” in ed., André Chastel, *The Renaissance: Essays in Interpretation* (London and New York: Methuen, 1982) 33–82; William Kerrigan and Gordon Braden, *The Idea of the Renaissance* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989). For a somewhat different view, including a discussion of the transition from what he terms “charismatic culture” to “intellectual culture,” see C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950–1200* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994) 4–9; and “Charismatic Body – Charismatic Text,” *Exemplaria* 9 (1997): 117–37.
- 46 Chris Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome: Illuminating the Dark Ages, 400–1000* (New York: Viking, 2009) 5. But see especially two much older articles by Herbert Weisinger: “The Self-Awareness of the Renaissance as a Criterion of the Renaissance,” *Papers of the Michigan Academy of Arts and Letters* 29 (1943): 561–67; and “The Renaissance Theory of the Reaction against the Middle Ages as a Cause of the Renaissance,” *Speculum* 20 (1945): 461–67. See also Wallace Ferguson, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought: Five Centuries of Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1948).
- 47 Philippa Berry, “Renewing the Concept of the Renaissance: The Cultural Influence of Paganism Reconsidered,” in *Textures of Renaissance Knowledge*, ed. Philippa Berry and Margaret Tudeau-Clayton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) 24. Berry is discussing Stephen Batman’s treatise *The Golden Booke of the Leaden Gods* (1557), which she identifies as “the first English mythography,” but which she calls “a very inferior contribution to the mythographic genre” whose “chief interest resides in its polemical exposition or the religious and cultural strangeness represented by classical myth and philosophy” (*ibid.*).

3 The web of myths

Maffeo Vegio's *Aeneid XIII* as a metaphor for humanism

In 1428 Maffeo Vegio published his *Supplement* to the *Aeneid* – more popularly referred to as *Book XIII*. Unapologetically attaching himself, not merely to a genealogical tradition, but literally to an iconic relic, Vegio, as Michael C. J. Putnam characterizes his remarkable act, “implicitly claim[ed] for himself the title of *Vergil redivivus*.”¹ The boldness of Vegio’s affiliation impels us to try to distinguish between the *Supplement* as a cultural-genealogical incursion and as a metaphor for humanism itself. Vegio’s authorial self-embodiment as Virgil, *auctoritate sine parem*, adumbrates Christopher Columbus’s self-pedigreed prophecy fulfillment and all the later personifications of Columbus as a “neo-Aeneas.” The threshold between devolutionary authority and a sibylline verticality of history characterizes these early modern remythicalizations as metaphors for transcultural descent.

The audacity of “becoming” Virgil has perhaps lost some of its resonance. By some lights, however, it was probably not entirely unequal to Columbus’s trumpeted claims to have fulfilled the providential scheme. Virgil’s status can hardly be overestimated, both as a poet and as a perennial vatic presence. The literary tradition of reimagining the institutionalized texts of the past had only just begun when Vegio wrote his thirteenth book of the *Aeneid*. His aim, however, is considerably more sincere, or more naïve, than we’ve become accustomed to seeing in this tradition. Now we have Joyce’s *Ulysses*, a modern-day parody, and Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*. We have Nikos Kazantzakis’s *Odyssey: A Modern Sequel* and we have Tennyson’s poignantly mordant *Ulysses*, which brings us into the restless mind of the hero trapped, not on Calypso’s island, but at home on Ithaca. We have G. B. Shaw’s *Pygmalion*, another modern-day parody, and innumerable expansions, re-imaginings, and satires of biblical episodes: from *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes* to Howard Nemerov’s *Cain*, from Hexameral epics like Du Bartas’s *Works and Days* to John Dryden’s topically charged *Absalom and Achitophel*, to Ada Langworthy Collier’s 1885 poem *Lilith*, Oscar Wilde’s *Salome*, and Paddy Chayefsky’s *Gideon*. We even have Freud’s controversial *Moses and Monotheism*.

The Renaissance literary scene did not offer such a plethora of reworked, or worked-over, texts, despite the widespread imitation of genres and styles. On first glance Vegio’s aim seems obvious. He hoped to forge a link to the most esteemed classical poet – and for “forge,” beyond the smithy metaphor, read “counterfeit” and also “force a link.” His *Aeneid XIII* conflates genealogy and imitation, and,

in Croce's terms, exposes historical continuity as narrative art. If he weren't so transparent we might applaud Vegio's prescience in bridging the literary gap. He not only extends Virgil, but brings close imitations of Ovid into his descriptions. Especially notable is the stellification of Aeneas, which occurs after Vegio certifies the peaceful, cultural amalgamation of Trojans and Italians:

Iam paribus Phryges atque Itali se moribus ultro
et socia ingent firmabant pectora amore
concordique aequas miscebant foedere leges.

It was a time when Trojans and Italians willingly strengthen[ed] the bonds of their alliance through the sharing of customs and through deepening affection; harmony through equality of law was their united agreement.²

There is no desert here where they call it peace. Taking advantage of this unparalleled social unity, Venus, Aeneas's mother, approaches Jupiter to remind him of his promise to deify her son. She notes that, currently, everyone in Italy "takes delight in three years of sacred peace" ("omnes gaudere sacra tris pace per annos," l. 600) and that "Already Aeneas's virtue in its fullness lays claim to the celestial pole" ("Iamque optat matura polos Aeneia virtus," l. 605). Here too Vegio is prescient, this time in his use of the word *virtus*; as Putnam suggests, Vegio's Aeneas "must be made the emblem of Renaissance *virtù*, the combination of valor of body and excellence of mind which shapes the essence of the ideal Italian prince."³ Or certainly will shape that princely essence in the century to come, as Machiavelli, Castiglione, and other authors prescribe.

Jupiter keeps his promise when Aeneas dies, and Venus flies down to Laurentum to retrieve the body. She commands a stream by the name of Numicius to purify her son.

Hunc corpus nati abluere et deferre sub undas,
quicquid erat mortale, iubet. Dehinc laeta recentem
felicemque animam secum super aera duxit,
immisitque Aenean astris, quem Iulia proles
indigitem appellat templisque imponit honores.

(ll. 626–30)

She commands him to wash away from her son's body whatever is mortal and to carry it beneath his waves. Then in happiness she conducts the fresh, blessed soul with her into the heavens, and installs Aeneas among the stars. His Julian tribe calls him Indigites and bestows honor upon him in temples.⁴

Oddly, Vegio makes no effort to associate this purifying immersion with baptism, or any other corpse-washing tradition outside the pagan model. On the contrary, he deliberately restricts himself to an allusion to the Ovidian passage that describes the same scene of Aeneas's bodily purification and ascension into the heavens. In Sebastian Brantare's 1502 woodcuts dedicated to *Aeneid XIII*, Aeneas dies on the riverbank with Venus standing in the water and a tiny Cupid at his shoulder (see Figure 3.1).

Eneidos



Impofui finem. nūc stat fententia menti:
 Qua ductorē alto ipfe phrygū fuccedere cœlo
 Inftituit: firma eft: numeroq; inferre deorum
 Conftar: & id conędo libens: tu fi quid in ipfo
 Mortale eft: ad me: atq; aſtris ingentibus adde.
 Quin fi alios ſua habet virtus: q; laude perenni.
 Accingant: ſefe geſtis præſtatibus orbem
 Exhorrent: illos ruſum ſup æthera mittam.
 Aſſenſere omnes ſuperi: nec regia iuno.
 Abnuat: at magnū ancām ſuadebat ad altum

Efferrī cœlum: & voces addebat amicas.
 Tum ven⁹ acrias deſcēdit lapſa per auras. ⁊
 Laurentumq; petit vicina numicius vndis
 Fluminis vbi currit i aquora: harū die rect⁹.
 Tūc corp⁹ gnati abluere: & deferre ſub vndas
 Quicqd erat mortale iuber: de hic lata recentē:
 Foelicemq; animā ſecum ſuper acra duxit.
 Immiſitq; æneā aſtris: quem iulſa proles.
 Indigerem appellat: rēpliq; imponit honores.
 Einis

Figure 3.1 Woodcut from Sebastian Brant's illustrated *Aeneid XIII* (1502)⁵

Vegio's text resists Christianization, either allegorical or anagogical. It is a distinctively liminal creation, holding a taut position between the iconic past and a charisma-hungry present. We should probably see the *Supplement*, absent any reference to a providential mission, as an experiment in a new kind of transcultural identification, and, significantly, a permanent grafting of genealogies: Julian offspring transform a Trojan into an "Indiges" Italian.

Not everyone, however, accepted Vegio's secularizing tactics of assimilation, at least not without a pretense of protest. In his 1513 translation of the *Aeneid*, Gavin Douglas includes Book XIII only after recounting, in a Prologue, how an angry Maphaeus Vegius came to England to chastise the weary translator in a dream:

On sleep I slade; where soon I saw appear
An agit man, and said, 'What does thou here
Under my tree, and willest me nae good?'
Methocht I lurkit up under my hood
To spy this auld, and that was as stern of speech
As had he been a mediciner or leech.

(ll. 75–80)⁶

Douglas, who is apparently sleeping under Vegio's tree, thinks the poet speaks sternly enough to be a "leech." He notices then that his clothes are threadbare and look as though they haven't been changed in forty years. But he observes "on his heid of laurel-tree a crown, / Like to some poet of the auld fashion" (ll. 97–98). He quickly adopts a posture of "reverence," apologizes for any offense he might have given, and promises to make amends. But he assures the old man that "if I have perfect sicht, / Unto my doom, I never saw you ere" (ll. 91–92).

"Weel," quod the other, "wald thou mercy cry
And mak amends, I shall remit this fault;
But, otherwise, that seat shall be full salt!
Knaws thou nocht Maphaeus Vegius, the poet,
That unto Virgil's lusty books sweet
The thirteenth book eikit *Eneadane*?
I am the samen, and of thee naithing fain,
That has the tother twelve into thy tongue
Translate of new, they may be read and sung
Ower Albion isle, into your vulgar leed;
But to my book yet list thee tak nae heed."

(ll. 96–106)

This is a curious example of cultural genealogy occurring in an atmosphere of mild resistance. Why does Douglas stage his neglect of Book XIII in this way, as if its introduction "Ower Albion isle" in the vulgar tongue were something he debated with himself, as if he weren't sure about telling the backstory?

More interesting, why does the Douglas character in the dream appear at once willing, even repentant, and at the same time a victim of force? He tries to excuse his omission by pleading exhaustion after completing the translation of Virgil's text. In a brief burst of exculpation he first adduces, unwisely, a parallel between Book XIII and the fifth wheel on a cart, and then – even more unwisely – he quotes Jerome quoting Psalm 14.1: “‘They are corrupt and made abominable / In their studying things unprofitable’” (ll. 127–28). Needless to say, these excuses enrage Maphaeus:

“Yea, smy,” quod he, ‘wald thou escape me sae?
 In faith we shall nocht thus part ere we gae!
 How think we he essoins him to astart,
 As all for ‘conscience’ and ‘devout heart,’
 Feigning him Jerome for to counterfeit
 Whereas he ligs bedovin, lo! In sweat!”

(ll. 131–36)

Maphaeus's contempt is raw and stinging. He seems especially displeased with Douglas's attempt to “feign” Jerome. The fiction allows Douglas to strike a posture of self-deprecation in regard to his worthiness, an expression of the humility *topos* in the form of a reproach from an “auld” poet wearing a laurel crown. The Prologue – dream, accusations, and exculpatory expostulations – seems to lead to this declaration from Maphaeus:

“I let thee wit, I am nae heathen wicht;
 And if thou has aforetime gane unricht,
 Following sae lang Virgil, a gentile clerk,
 Why shrinks thou with my short Christian work?
 For though it be but poetry we say,
 My book and Virgil's moral been, baith tway.”

(ll. 137–42)

Maphaeus reasons this way: if you could spend so long “following” Virgil, a “gentile” (heathen), then you shouldn't shrink from my short Christian work. The word “following” suggests a leader, or a guide (Dante's *duce*), and a share in the charismatic Virgilian legend. But, significantly, Vegio's *Supplement* is not, in reality, a “short Christian work.” Therefore, the transmission of values that Douglas – or Douglas's Maphaeus – advertises only exists in the fiction of the Prologue. They are utterly “local” values, part and parcel of a new technological (rhetorical) production: the translation.

So why the violent outburst by Maphaeus? Why dramatize a demonstratively Christian narrator's coercion into translating a “short Christian work”?

“Lend me a fourteen-nicht, how ever it be,
 Or, by the father's saul me gat,” quod he,

“Thou shall dear buy that ever thou Virgil knew.”
 And, with that word, down of the seat me drew;
 Synne to me with his club he made a brade,
 And twenty rutes upon my rigging laid,
 Till “*Deo, Deo*, mercy”! did I cry
 And, by my richt hand streekit up in heich,
 Hicht to translate his book, in honour of God
 And his Apostles twelve, in the number odd.
 (ll. 143–52)

It may be that this scene is meant only to reflect Douglas’s reluctance to include a non-genuine Virgilian text. But it also provides a glimpse of the narrow threshold between translation and genealogy, the sometimes overlooked possibility that we should revise our thinking to reflect *translatio studii genealogiaeque*. Gavin Douglas, though he has to be beaten into it, seems to be thinking in these terms – that is, in terms of cultural genealogy.

The humanist cult of genealogy

Peter Bietenholz has observed that “Genealogy in the Renaissance is a vast field for study. To limit consideration to forebears placed on a family tree will not do justice to the spirit of the age. Inheritance through the mind was as important as inheritance through the blood.”⁷ While Bietenholz is speaking about all areas of early modern culture, his point is even more significant in connection to the humanists. As far as I can tell, no other group in intellectual history was as obsessed with genealogy, with ancient authority, and with appropriate descent. Scores upon scores of treatises begin with legitimizing genealogies, and habitual readers of early modern texts become inured to the constant references to Tully, Virgil, Seneca, and the rest of the Roman (and sometimes Greek) intellectual pantheon. For some reason, when we come across these ubiquitous self-authorizing gestures, many of which seem automatic, we rarely stop to wonder why the authors almost never cite anyone from recent centuries. Much of late antiquity, with the exception of a few distinguished clerics, along with virtually all the Middle Ages, seems to disappear from the cultural lineages.

Yet the historical facts tell a different story. Medievalists have claimed for some time that the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance is more illusion than reality.⁸ Even Petrarch’s famed awareness of the historicity of the past has met with skepticism from critics who recognize similar awareness in earlier authors.⁹ Bietenholz himself speaks of the increased aptitude among early modern people to distinguish between what he terms *historia* and *fabula*, insisting on a minimal breach between epochs:

While this growing sense of discrimination does apply to the field of genealogy, it must be emphasized . . . that neither Renaissance humanism nor the Reformation effected anything like a clean breach with medieval traditions.

The desire to identify the origins of a family, a city, a profession or a people ultimately flows from the elementary human need to find one's roots, that is, to unravel the mysteries of the self. In Antiquity the Greeks and also the Jews had eagerly inquired after such origins. In the Middle Ages the groundwork was laid for the web of genealogical myths that was to spread in the Renaissance period until it enveloped almost every facet of the social fabric.¹⁰

The direct link implied here between unraveling the mysteries of the self and a Renaissance "web of genealogical myths" requires closer scrutiny than it has so far received. To begin, we should establish the difference between finding one's roots and manufacturing a myth of origins. Even if we accept that the Greeks and Jews could have established anything like accurate genealogies – or that they would have wanted to – it is naïve to see in the sometimes bizarre accounts of cultural descent that emerged in the Middle Ages a serious groundwork for plausible genealogies. Take Fredegar's (Fredigarius's) seventh-century Latin chronicle of the French kings' descent from Troy (cited by Bietenholz). The story, absurd enough in its geographical assertions, was most successful, according to Bietenholz, in showing that "Priam himself was descended from Shem, the first son of Noah" (190).¹¹ It's difficult to see how such genealogies as this one – like Noah>Japheth>Janus and Berosus's amalgamations – can be the so-called groundwork for anything besides further remythification.

It may be that every human being feels a hunger for descent, a desire to identify origins. According to Nietzsche in *The Genealogy of Morals*, this desire reflects an imperative to interpret and transform the past. Cultural genealogy – or, more precisely, the act of fashioning a cultural genealogy – contains more than a pinch of both interpretation and transformation. The mythical figures and dubious transcultural connections we find in Renaissance genealogies deliberately transform the past by reinterpreting its relationship to contemporary inheritors in a particular line – even if the line is not human at all, but a descent of abstractions. Take, for example, the anonymous "Pedigree of Popery; or the Genealogy of the Antichrist," (Figure 3.2) which was printed in 1688, the year of the Glorious Revolution:¹²

We might safely argue that the stridency of this anti-Catholic publication, a flyer presumably supporting the overthrow of the Catholic monarch James II in the year of the Glorious Revolution, is an odd match for the supposed logic of the genealogical method. And maybe we aren't meant to take the method too seriously. What is important, I think, is the value accorded genealogy as a persuasive *systematic* discourse, a discourse, moreover, with extraordinarily syncretic range. We not only cross cultures, from Eden to Rome to Babylon (a typical reversal of historical time), but also follow the anti-charismatic strain of Sin from the Devil to contemporary Popery and – worst of all – Jesuitism. The pedigree follows common practice, linking the present to an original bearer of charisma (except, of course, that the Devil can never technically have charisma, which means "gift of grace"). But why use the genealogical method? What persuasive power did it carry in such an obviously manufactured set of descent relations? For us, the detail and raw enmity evoke a smile,

[16]

The PEDIGREE of POPERY;
OR,
The GENEALOGY of ANTICHRIST.

THE DEVIL begat Sin,
Sin begat Ignorance,
Ignorance begat Error and his Brethren,
Error begat Pride,
Pride begat Free-will,
Free-will begat Merit,
Merit begat Forgetfulness of Grace,
Forgetfulness of Grace begat Transgression,
Transgression begat Distrust,
Distrust begat Dissatisfaction,
Dissatisfaction begat the Sacrifice of the Mass,
The Sacrifice of the Mass begat Superstition,
Superstition begat Hypocrisy,
Lying Hypocrisy begat Gain, of her that was the Wife of the Offertory,
Gain begat Purgatory,
Purgatory begat Anniversary or yearly Masses, or Trentals,
Anniversary (being a foundation) begat the Patrimony of the Church,
The Patrimony of the Church begat Wicked Mammon,
Mammon begat Luxury,
Luxury begat Usurpation,
Usurpation begat Cruelty,
Cruelty begat Immunity,
Immunity begat Lordship,
Lordship begat Pomp,
Pomp begat Ambition,
Ambition begat Simony,
Simony begat the POPE and his Brethren the Cardinals, in the Transportation into *Babylon*; and after the Transportation into *Babylon*,
The POPE begat the Mystery of Iniquity,

The Mystery of Iniquity begat School-Divinity,
School-Divinity begat the Casting away of Holy Scripture,
The Casting away the Holy Scripture begat the Legend,
The Legend begat Monkery,
Monkery begat Blind Zeal,
Blind Zeal begat the Murthering of Saints,
The Murthering of Saints begat the Contempt of God,
Contempt of God begat Dispensation,
Dispensation begat Licence to Sin,
Licence to Sin begat Carnal Policy,
Carnal Policy begat Jesuitism,
Jesuitism begat Four Monsters, *Equivocation, Mental Reservation, Probable Opinion and Direction of the Intention*;
These Four Monsters survive to this day, and begat a Multitude of Sons and Daughters, *viz.* Atheism, Tyranny, Treason, Assassination, Perjury, Inquisition, Massacre, Masquerade and Open Popery, City-Burning, Chequer-Stopping, Charter-Catching, Large Finings, Severe Whippings, *Non obstante*, Closetings, Subscribings, Member-makings, Addressings, and all kind of Abominations, which walking abroad in a Dress of Religion and Dissimulation, complete the whole Train of Antichrist, &c. To the perpetual Establishing and Setting up of POPERY, and the putting down of and for ever subverting and casting away all Christianity.

A Let-

Figure 3.2 *The Genealogie of the Antichrist* (1688).

but would such topics have been at all amusing for militant Protestants in the seventeenth century?

In analyzing medieval family trees, art historian Christiane Klapisch-Zuber has observed a valuable phenomenon, one we would do well to apply to written

genealogies as well as to their visual counterparts. “One understands,” Klapisch-Zuber says, “that the image of [the] tree, represented in a natural state but undermined by its strange population, assumes functions which do not furnish current genealogical knowledge. Within its own logic, the figure seems to respond to other expectations, to touch an imagination richer than the intelligence and the memory called upon by the enumeration or the diagrammatic transcription of a genealogy.”¹³ The “strange population” inhabiting the branches of the trees to which Klapisch-Zuber refers includes figures drawn from classical myths to the Garden of Eden, with all sorts of dubious connections along the way to particular lineages. And, notably, the lineages need not be human – Klapisch-Zuber prints a plate of a fifteenth-century manuscript by Honoré Bonet of *L’Arbre des batailles* (*The Tree of Battles*) – or conventionally aristocratic. There are trees of jurists, popes, and, significantly, inasmuch as we so often label genealogy an exercise in patrilineal power, “Les femmes des Babenberg.”¹⁴ The only constant, the only controlling factor of genealogical representation, is time itself.

Numinous connections between generations, which are sometimes haphazard in terms of strict descent, are not only reminiscent of the crazy mixtures found in Boccaccio’s genealogical trees. They also lead inevitably to such curiosities as Agnolo Bronzino’s portrait of Cosimo I de’ Medici as Orpheus [Figure 3.3, ca. 1538–40]. The model for the body in this painting was the Apollo Belvedere, with Cosimo’s head stuck disproportionately onto the neck. And if we happen to be looking for an erotic or homoerotic element, there’s also something suspicious going on with the lyre of the bow between the legs of Orpheus. (This suggestiveness is relevant, of course, relevant to Orpheus, that is, since much of Orpheus’s trouble stemmed from his struggles with *eros*.) Presumably, the portrait was painted as a compliment, but why didn’t Bronzino adjust the proportions so that Cosimo didn’t look like an interloper pasted onto a classical body? A body, incidentally, which wasn’t Orpheus’s (it was Apollo’s) and wasn’t even quite Greek.

More puzzling still is Rembrandt’s *Self-Portrait as the Apostle Paul* (Figure 3.4). Granting that the practice of using portraits to establish transcultural links was alive and well much later than the fifteenth century, I still find it difficult to understand exactly what Rembrandt had in mind. Is this an assertion of his piety or does it express his aspiration to see Christ? To my jaded eye, it seems a little hubristic to paint oneself as the Apostle. But maybe I shouldn’t see pride here. Maybe it’s a form of honor. In any case, the point is that Rembrandt is summoning the same sort of living charismatic myth that Bronzino calls on – his self-portrait is not nostalgia so much as a demonstration of the arrest of a unique and enduring Pauline quality that can be accessed and aestheticized.

While Bronzino’s and Rembrandt’s paintings don’t reproduce genealogies in the literal sense, they characterize a typical transcultural masquerade that propagates the idea of a patently charismatic association with heroic figures – a kind of optimistic virtual reality. That the painters lived two centuries apart should remind us of the durability of the myth of charismatic continuity and of the popularity of certain forms of remythification. We find numerous examples of this kind of remythification in medieval and early modern art, such as paintings of the Holy



Figure 3.3 Angelo Bronzino, *Cosimo de' Medici as Orpheus* (ca. 1538–40). By permission of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Family in brocaded Renaissance robes, or of the Annunciation taking place in a marble palace, or saints carrying books in anachronistic languages. But if anachronism is the vehicle of this metaphor of descent, charismatic continuity is the tenor. The gap in time disappears in a mythicized continuum of divine authority, whether that divinity is the pagan Orpheus or Saint Paul, the man who saw Christ. Discontinuity cannot survive the devolutionary myth of charismatic genealogy.



Figure 3.4 Rembrandt, *Self-Portrait as the Apostle Paul* (1661). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands/De Agostini Picture Library/The Bridgeman Art Library.

Nor have we outgrown this kind of remythicization, despite our self-consciousness about myth and our “enlightened” trust in demythology.¹⁵ *Orpheus* (Figure 3.5) by sculptor Charles N. Niehaus is a characteristic example of charismatic remythicization.

The largest free-standing bronze statue in the United States, it stands at Fort McHenry in Baltimore, placed there in honor of Francis Scott Key in 1922. President Harding dedicated the statue in a live, nationwide broadcast.



Figure 3.5 Charles N. Niehaus, *Orpheus with the Large Foot* (1922), unveiled June 14, 1922 (Flag Day).¹⁶

Ridiculous – or maybe desperate – as it may seem to us, the obvious attempt by those who commissioned *Orpheus* is to link Orphic poetic charisma in a numinous genealogical line to the lyric-writer of the national anthem.

It can't be stressed too often that the basis of remythification is the accumulation of genealogical charisma. As Kolakowski says, the common motivation of myth is to arrest physical time and “to see in the mutability of things not only *change*, but also *accumulation*,” allowing us “to believe that what is past is retained” (4). The myth of cultural genealogy is no exception. It depends for its survival, not only on what Ernst Cassirer called the “sense of becoming,” which he found in all myths, but also on Kolakowski's sense that “what is past is retained.” Of course, as I have repeatedly pointed out, *nothing* is actually retained in genealogical mythmaking – that is, nothing besides the exiguous accumulation of charismatic authority passed down in a bloodline, a race, a profession, a place, or an art. That accumulated authority is based on a discourse of descent that alone sustains the diverse manifestations of anachronism and nostalgia, of continuity, accumulation, and imagined progress. We should recognize, however, that at bottom these variations of manufactured descent depend on that slippery

genealogical impulse Klapisch-Zuber describes as meant to touch an imagination richer than what one needs for transcriptions and diagrams.

The hunger for descent

The humanists overlooked few areas of human existence in their stupendous efforts to satisfy their hunger for cultural descent. As Marian Rothstein argues, “A sense of the living presence of the source is manifest in the Renaissance treatment of words, things, individuals, and institutions.”¹⁷ That “living presence” I have already identified in this book as charisma, the essential and often numinous component of all imagined sources and genealogies. Most societies in history have felt a compulsion to identify their origins, just as most have instituted their leading families as aristocrats, judges, or kings. But the humanists carried a normal social interest and political strategy to a cultish extreme. In current critical jargon, they “fetishized” the genealogical method and revealed a hunger for cultural descent unparalleled in history. For instance, as David Price pointed out in a recent biography of Johannes Reuchlin, it was *de rigueur* to have not only a personal, but also a civic pedigree:

Apparently, it was not desirable to a Renaissance-minded German to live in a city that did not have a connection to classical antiquity. Reuchlin removed that blemish by “discovering” that his hometown had been founded (in Germany’s Black Forest!) by ancient Trojans fleeing from the wrath of Achilles. Reuchlin began his first major publication, *Miracle-Making Word* of 1494, with a panegyric description of Pforzheim, claiming that the town’s name (“Phorcensis” in Latin) derived from its founder, a certain Phorcys, who was a minor figure in Homer’s *Iliad*.¹⁸

Price goes on in a footnote to recount the full history Reuchlin claims for Phorcys and the founding of his city. Then, parenthetically, he remarks that “[N]eedless to say, Reuchlin does not mention that, according to the *Iliad*, Ajax slew Phorcys before the topless towers of Ilium.”¹⁹ Faced with such an elaborate genealogical fantasy, it is irresistible to pull away the veil – and laugh. But in fact there’s more at stake than the veracity of the descent from Troy, more at stake than content or material proof. The process itself is at issue, and, as discussed in the first chapter, the genealogical technique is the message of the myth.

The descent from Troy was ubiquitous in European culture, more commonly as a mark of royal lineage than civic legitimacy. As Heather James points out in *Shakespeare’s Troy*, “The Troy legend became a transcultural, transhistorical model onto which poets such as Ariosto and Ronsard might graft indigenous myths of origin.”²⁰ This act of grafting is tantamount to the technique of cultural genealogy. James’s study focuses innovatively on how Shakespeare’s “translations of empire” take place in an interrogative mood, or at less encomiastic and more restive moments in his relations” with Queen Elizabeth and King James.²¹ This focus in itself, though largely confined to the political implications of drama,

adumbrates my contention that transcultural descent is fashioned by contemporary needs. James suggests that “[T]he political authority inscribed in Vergil’s epic and its Trojan myth awaited only transcription into the culture, history, and language of European governments in need of a legitimate history.”²² But we shouldn’t be too hasty here. The accomplishment of transculturalism comes at a high cost. Acts of grafting and cultural “transcription” occur only through aesthetic distortions. In other words, thanks largely to the humanists, idealizations of ancient *auctoritas* and other charismatic values were suspended in the newly formed amber of a spurious past. This was the most lasting achievement of their *poesis*. And their preferred technique was systematic genealogy.

The energy of the genealogical fabrications and the extraordinary range of the subjects traced make a stunning impression in our post-encyclopedic intellectual age. One would not have to look far to find ostensibly credible genealogies leading back to Ur-moments in the establishment of, for example, cities, sculpture, table manners, military practices, erotic arts, painting, ethnicity, divinity, and, above all perhaps, poetry. The prolific accounts of the origins of poetry held a unique place in the humanists’ curricular ambitions, in their revision of the medieval *trivium*, and in their institution of the *studia humanitatis*.

Other origin myths were by no means neglected, however, as a brief survey will show. Cities, for instance, received considerable attention. One wonders what the force of Juno’s bargain with Jupiter had in regard to the descent of city cultures. How Virgilian in spirit were the etymologically inspired derivations of city names? How much of ancient dialect and dress, or ancient ritual, was thought by early modern origin-hunters to have been “commingled” (like Virgil’s *commixti*. . . *Teuceri*) with modern practice?²³ And, most significantly, how much authority was supposed to have been retained from the ancient *urbes*?

Many of the treatises on the origins of cities begin with genealogical lists of prominent men and women. This is probably because the link between personal charismatic authority and civic continuity is a testimony to the value of ethno-genic fabling in cultural descent. Guglielmo da Pastrengo’s *De originibus*, for example, cites an alphabetical list of biblical figures, ancient gods and goddesses, literary heroes, kings, Greek orators, and Christian bishops. As Philip Jacks has put it, “Beginning with the *uomini illustri*, Guglielmo progressed to the founders of famous cities, and finally to the *inventores rerum*.”²⁴ Yet there is a curious lack of valuation placed on these figures, no valence of moral superiority where one might expect it on the biblical material, nor, for that matter, any consciousness on Guglielmo’s part of the real or mythical status of such founders as Apollo, the Argives, or Ceres. It must be said in Guglielmo’s defense, however, that for every founding figure he supplies an authoritative textual source, including Genesis, Isidore of Seville, Cassiodorus, Gallienus, and Seneca. Thus:

Apollo medicine artis repertor apud Grecos perhibetur; hanc eius filius Esculepius laude et opera amplavit . . . idem [Isidorus].

Argonaute, qui Iasone duce in Cholchos profecti sunt, copertarum navium usum instituere primi: Cassiodorus.

Achilles herbam balaustion, que et gentifolia dicitur, primus invenit, cuius foliorum pulvis omnia antiqua vulnera et fumosa curat: Gallienus.²⁵

Apollo invented medicine, the Argonauts (with Jason at the helm) were first to sail, and, somewhat surprisingly, Achilles displayed a botanical interest and is said to have discovered a plant. Did Guglielmo believe his sources? Did he or his readers believe the origin tales? The answers to those questions matter only if we want to establish a connection between the emptying out of ancient myths and the retention of ancient genealogy. Even in a list as dry as Guglielmo's an attitude begins to emerge. Pagan or mythical entries such as those just cited necessarily appear in the alphabetical scheme side by side with, for instance,

David propheta ymnos in Dei laudem primus cecinit; urbem, que prius Solima dicebatur, Iebuseis expulsas, Ierosolimam numcupavit: Iosephus.

or:

Rebecha, cum desponderetur uxor Iacob, primo interrogata consensum adhibuit: Genesis xiiii legitur.²⁶

These *illustri* seem to carry equal weight with Apollo, Esculepius, Jason, and Achilles. Yet the last reference to Rebecca comes from Genesis, arguably the most authoritative source text of all for early modern readers (after the Gospels). But there is no indication of that authority in the *De originibus*. Presumably, readers' judgments depended on their own education, intelligence, and unquestioning faith in the Judeo-Christian truths as fables of a different order. Even allowing for this unspoken hierarchy of source material, however, the sense of a mixed cultural descent is difficult to ignore. We may find more of a jumble than a genealogy in the *De originibus*, but, ironically, the implication of a transcultural reality is reinforced by the unexpected juxtapositions in the text.

Guglielmo's origins of cities offer the same relativism in regard to myths. His alphabetical scheme and lack of commentary make it impossible to discern his opinion, or to adduce some sort of valuation to the different origins he cites:

Idumea, regio Syriaca, que prius Edon a filio Esau – Edon quod Hebrayca lingua rubrum sonat – dicebatur, a Grecis sic dicta est: Iosephus.

Iudea, Syrie portio, a Iuda filio Iacob, accepit nomen, unde et Iduei: Isidorus.

Ionica, regio Grecie, a Ione, Naulochi filia, quam procaciter itinera insidiantem intermit Hercules, nominis traxit originem: Iustinus.

Icarus, Dedali filius, Icarie insule moriens nomen tribuit atque: Solinus.²⁷

Where we would expect different registers we encounter an impenetrable sameness. Further, what was the purpose of this text? Did Guglielmo hope to establish a history of origins or a compendium of myths? Was the alphabetical structure

meant to integrate less authoritative myths – or younger myths – with myths of confirmed authority? Or was the opposite true – did the integration of Greek and Roman “myth” with Judeo-Christian “truth” lend a new authority to the ancient material, thus legitimizing *renovatio* and *translatio studii*?

Not even the Christian genealogical myth was immune to doubt, or self-doubt, resulting in a desire to prove unchallenged legitimacy. Early modern writers who discussed the subject at all realized that the absence of Israelite heralds, or some form of archival record, had to be accounted for in the new era of scientific genealogy. John Speed, for example, speaking of the centuries between “Eve and Paradise” and the “Virgin and Bethlehem,” explains how the genealogies survived:

Betwixt which persons and times God himselfe was the *Recorder*, and with that finger first writ the Law, let the hand of *Moses* to name from father to sonne, the persons produced: even from *Adam*, that fell from a pleasurable Garden of rest, unto *Joshuah*, that led and set the people in a pleasurable land of rest; being thirtie generations in a direct line, besides their collaterals.

In all which, the promises of God appeared, that was made to man in his *Christ*: In *Noah*, the comfort that the world in him should enjoy. In *Abraham*, the Promise, that the world in him should be blessed. And in *David*, the sonne, and King, that should raigne everlastingly.

All which things the *Genealogies* doe testifie, and we know that their testimonie is true: and how carefully their pedegrees have been kept, wee see still recorded by the holy Ghosts writ.²⁸

With “God himselfe . . . the *Recorder*” Speed’s sacred genealogies gain an unchallengeable legitimacy. The same finger that “first writ the Law” also recorded the generations from Adam to Christ. The important connection is between God’s finger and “the holy Ghosts writ” inasmuch as Speed links the Old Testament God to the New Testament Holy Ghost through the writing of the sacred genealogies. He notes that “the care of preserving the holy *Genealogies*, the holy Ghosts pen hath well shewed in the first booke of the *Chronicles*, where the first nine Chapters doth affoord in a manner no other matter, besides the rehearsall of the generations from *Adam*” (3). Speed’s faith in biblical genealogies springs from his conviction that “In them wee see the dispercions of Families in the peopleing of the World, and in them the government of the World when it was peopled” (5). But his main point is to establish a link between the ancient Hebrews and Christ, and implicitly Christianity: “*Genealogies* then, being the first step laid in the new Testament, are for use the first step that mounteth from earth unto heaven, as *Jacobs* Ladder did reach, by which the great *Archangell Christ* from the top descended, unto the lowest staffe, the Tabernacle of our flesh” (4–5). The curious upward-downward exchange of the genealogical ladder (explicitly associated with Jacob’s ladder) reveals the all-important fact of genealogy’s *devolutionary* character: genealogy preserves a charismatic essence *unchanged* despite the apparent progress forward in time, and, in the case of Christ, despite the fantastical change from “Archangell”

to flesh. Moreover, the very notion of descent is skewed in Speed's statement, for Christ "from the top [of the ladder] descended, unto the lowest staffe." This contradicts the conventional notion of a genealogical tree in which the descendants in the higher branches have not come from the top down, but from the roots upward.

The contradiction, however, is deliberate on Speed's part, an example of the foundational (and somewhat circular) argument of *Clowde of Witnesses* that all sacred genealogies could only be considered sacred because they described a descent to Christ. In an extraordinary reading of Genesis 3, he repeatedly links Christ to the fallen Eve.

Through these *holy Genealogies*, *God* became *Man* (the word before all things, was in mans loynes inclosed, till the *fulnesse of time came*, that *God sent his Sonne to bee made of a Woman*.

This blessed *fruit* therefore in whom our election was sealed, *before the foundation of the world*, was first promised to our first parents in *Paradise* after their taste of the forbidden fruit of death, when likewise the *Serpents* malice was quailed by this sentence, *I wil put enmity between thee and the woman, and betweene thy seed and her seed. He shall breake thine head, and thou shalt bruse his heele*. And that this her seed then promised was the very *Messiah* to come, both *Jewes* and *Gentiles* have acknowledged, the *Fathers* looked for, and the *Patriarckes* beleaved in.

The Scriptures thus beginning with a *Messiah*, the onely *Alpha* of al our happinesse, aimeth at no other marke besides him, the onely *Omega* of all our hopes.²⁹

This is a feat more of genealogical assertion than of proof. Moreover, it is somewhat unusual for Speed to link Eve's seed with "the very *Messiah* to come." Much more common was the link to David's seed, or at the most distant to Abraham's, especially inasmuch as the chief objective of Christian genealogy was to establish the Virgin's royal status.

The sort of telescoping transcultural genealogy produced, along with its bizarre selectivity in regard to ancestors, could reveal questionable and even unpalatable motives. Speed is a good example. By prefacing his "Alpha/Omega" statement with the evangelical language of the Christian Bible, by claiming that "*God* became *Man* (the word before all things, was in mans loynes inclosed, till the *fulnesse of time came*, that *God sent his Sonne to bee made of a Woman*," characterizes the manner in which Speed manipulates genealogy both to serve his polemical aims and to wield the genealogical myth as a repressive instrument. Repression is a predictable by-product of genealogy because, *a fortiori*, genealogies must exclude all but particular bloodlines or sets of bloodlines (as in peerages). Elitism is inevitable, indeed desirable, just as the enforcement of elite status is inevitable (and desirable) for holding onto power and property. Christian genealogies usually repress Israelite culture by presenting it as a mere stepping-stone to the evangelical truths of the New Testament. Speed's genealogy adds a wrinkle. He introduces Christ into Eden. This is probably derived from the notion of Jesus as

the second Adam, but it's nonetheless an unusual narrative flourish in a genealogical passage. It allows Speed to supersede all of Israelite culture with the advent of Christ, who is purposefully identified by logocentric markings: "the word before all things, was in mans loynes inclosed"; and the alphabetical Messiah who is "the onely *Alpha* of al our happinesse, . . . the onely *Omega* of all our hopes."

The level of repression in such an assumption – that the Christian god was implanted in Adam's loins – may be staggering to us, but Speed's coreligionists would scarcely have noticed it. Such techniques were the pabulum of early modern cultural genealogies. It stands to reason, therefore, that the more mythologized the genealogical strain becomes – that is, as the original rationale for separating one group from another fades into the past – the more likely it is that it will also be elitist and dependent on the charismatically inspired fable that the members of a chosen line have attributes not available to others by natural means.

The lie of descent provides a means of power and control; the myth of heredity is the mortar between the bricks of authority's foundation. Although we tend to be drawn to the most sensationally unjust manifestations of the lie of descent like primogeniture, royal privilege, the kind of eugenics that calculates octoroons or the Gothic Line, and the mindless nationalisms that have ravaged the world in the past century, in truth a considerably more complex range of motives generates and sustains the lie. Genealogical fabling does not always end in genocide and violence, or oppression for that matter. It has also provided a solid foundation for the filial duties of agricultural societies, for the organization of guilds and crafts, and for such abstract notions as artistic competitiveness. But the complexity of motives does not alter the fact that the lie of descent remains so ingrained, the myth of genealogy so much a part of our epistemology, that only the effect of the manipulation causes difficulty, never the cause. Even as victims we live with and embrace the justification for descent-determined hierarchies, believing with a faith that would have appalled Freud (and surprises me) that we are connected by a natural lineage to past cultures, alien ideals, random family attributes, and transparently fabricated origins.

Now, it would be a relief if we could lay all the blame for this panorama of delusion at someone's door. My nomination for indictment would be the early modern humanists, who did more for genealogy than any single group in Western history. But it isn't fair to blame them. While the humanists' program of fanatical ancestor selection ensconced genealogical thinking in the Western episteme, their erudition and sheer energy also opened the door to cultural polyvalence. If the dangers of descent fables lie chiefly in the false establishment of "pure origins," then we might counter by suggesting that cultural polyvalence of the humanist kind undermines claims to purity. Even if the humanists proudly display great gouges of moral idealism, literary elitism, and selectivity rationalized as genealogical superiority, the multiplicity of the origins they claim to uncover, and the differences among the ancestors they claim, paradoxically make a pure line of descent impossible to establish. This may be an inadvertent by-product of their industriousness, but it serves as a lesson in ethnogenic reading. The more descent narratives we read, all leading to the same end, the more difficult it becomes to

believe in the truth of descent – and the easier it is to recognize that arbitrary selection rather than nature governs the creation of so-called genealogical truths.

Notes

- 1 Maffeo Vegio, *Short Epics*, ed. and trans. by Michael C. J. Putnam, with James Hankins (Cambridge, MA: I Tatti Renaissance Library, Harvard University Press, 2004) xii.
- 2 *Ibid.*, ll. 590–93. Hereafter line numbers are cited in the text.
- 3 *Ibid.*, xiii.
- 4 I am grateful to Christoph Irschmer for his help with this translation.
- 5 See Peter Schaeffer, “Maffeo Vegio and His *Aeneid XIII*,” Classics Technology Center (online resource), 2002: <http://ablemedia.com/ctcweb/showcase/schaeffervegio.html>.
- 6 Gavin Douglas, *The Aeneid (1513)*, 2 vols., ed. Gordon Kendal (London: The Modern Humanities Research Institution, 2011). Book XIII is in vol. 2. Line numbers appear in the text.
- 7 Peter Bietenholz, *Historia and Fabula: Myths and Legends in Historical Thought from Antiquity to the Modern Age* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994) 189. All of Bietenholz’s chapter 5 is of interest and, while I might disagree with his emphases, I owe much to his magisterial command of sources.
- 8 See, e.g., Lee Patterson, “On the Margin: Postmodernism, Ironic History, and Medieval Studies,” *Speculum* 65 (1990): 87–108, esp. 93: “What needs to be challenged is the crude binarism that locates modernity (‘us’) on one side and premodernity (‘them’) on the other, thus condemning the Middle Ages to the role of all-purpose alternative”; R. Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) esp. chap. 1, p. 17 and notes; Chris Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome: Illuminating the Dark Ages, 400–1000* (New York: Viking, 2009).
- 9 See Ronald G. Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients: The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni* (Boston, MA and Leiden: Brill, 2003).
- 10 Bietenholz, *Historia and Fabula*, 189–90.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 190.
- 12 This anonymous text appears in EEBO, listed as Wing / P1050, taken from a copy at the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery.
- 13 Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *L’Ombre Des Ancêtres: Essai sur L’Imaginaire Médiéval de la Parenté* (Fayard, 2000): “On devine que l’image de cet arbre, représenté au naturel mais déréalisé par sa bizarre population, assume de fonctions auxquelles ne pouvoient pas les savoirs généalogiques courants. Dan sa logique proper, la figure semble répondre à d’autres attentes, toucher à un imaginaire autrement riche que l’intelligence et la mémoire interpellées par l’énumération ou la transcription diagrammatique d’une généalogie” (8). See also: “L’arbre se serait mieux prêté aux intentions, aux espérances des clercs et des laïcs qui méditaient sur les filiations sacrées, humaines ou nationales” (9). [“The tree would be best taken as the intentions, as the hopes of the clerics and the laity who meditate on sacred, human, or national filiations.”] The notion of “sacred, human, or national” leaves plenty of latitude for different versions of transcultural descent.
- 14 See *ibid.*, Plates 27 and 41.
- 15 If Odo Marquard is to be believed, our trust is misplaced. See *Farewell to Matters of Principle: Philosophical Studies*, trans. Robert M. Wallace with the assistance of Susan Bernstein and James I. Porter (New York: Oxford University Press) 89 (quoted in chapter 5, p. 203).
- 16 *Fort McHenry: Pictorial Guidebook*, ed. Carey Vendrame (Liberty Island, NY, 1998: no pub.) 25 (flyleaf). See also Cindy Kelly, *Outdoor Sculpture in Baltimore: A Historical Guide to the Monumental City* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press,

- 2011) 146. The Niehaus statue is sometimes referred to as *Orpheus with the Awkward Foot*, which is a tautology or redundancy since the name “Oidipos” in Sophocles already means “swollen-footed” (as a baby Oedipus was shackled by his parents before being given to a shepherd for exposure on a hillside).
- 17 Marian Rothstein, “Etymology, Genealogy, and the Immutability of Origins,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 43 (1990): 332.
- 18 David H. Price, *Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 19.
- 19 Ibid. See 236n.43.
- 20 James, *Shakespeare’s Troy*, 15.
- 21 Ibid., 2.
- 22 Ibid., 15.
- 23 *Aeneid* 12: 835–36: “commixti corpore tantum /subsident Teucri.” See chapter 3.
- 24 Philip Jacks, *The Antiquarian and the Myth of Antiquity: The Origins of Rome in Renaissance Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 76. Not all the *illustri* are men, though they constitute the overwhelming majority.
- 25 Guglielmo da Pastrengo, *De viris illustribus et de originibus*, a cura di Guglielmo Bottari (Padua: Editrice Antenore, 1991) 248–49. Guglielmo, a contemporary and correspondent of Petrarch, completed his book in the second half of the fourteenth century, but it was not published until 1547. See Bottari’s introduction, xx–xxi.
- 26 Ibid., 255; 272.
- 27 Ibid., 340. The editor Bottari says that though “naulochi” appears in several codices, the word should be “Aulochi.”
- 28 John Speed, *A Cloud of Witnesses: And they the Holy Genealogies of the Sacred Scriptures* (London, 1620) 2.
- 29 Ibid., 123–24.

4 Manufacturing discontinuity

Backward from Byzantium

According to Judith Herrin, Byzantium was “born old,” a characterization that might be used to describe humanist culture – or one that the humanists, in regard to genealogy, might well embrace. But, whereas there is a manufactured element to the Petrarchan or Ficinian claim, there is historical justification in Herrin’s remark. “In contrast to other medieval societies,” Herrin explains, “both in the West and among the Muslims, Byzantium was old, many centuries old by the time of Charlemagne and Harun al-Rashid in AD 800, and the structure of its culture was both a constraint and a source of strength.”¹ Although the dialectic between constraint and strength might reflect the relationship of the humanists to the “dark ages” they created in their fictions, the suppression (and denigration) of medieval influence gives the phrase “born old” more importance than the dialectic that produces it. The idea of a renaissance, or *rinascimento* as Giorgio Vasari called it in relation to the arts, contains little hint of a developmental pattern (even though Vasari’s *Lives* traces the stages of painting leading up to the Second Coming in Michelangelo). *Renaissance* implies a kind of arrival, or descent, not so much *ab ovo* as fully grown, by fiat. In this sense, too, the humanists were “born old,” with emphasis on the relationship of birth simultaneously to the remythicization of their cultural legacy and to their intellectual merit as legatees.

Had access to Byzantine history been more readily available, the humanists might have found a remarkable model for their project of sustained manipulation of traditional symbols in the adaptation of “deep inherited structures” by the imperial authorities.² But the record of that long civilization was very spotty until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As a result, the humanists’ relationship to Byzantium remains a bit of a puzzle, nurtured in the 1400s by dependence on scholars and teachers from Constantinople, but hampered by ignorance, or very partial knowledge, of the historical heritage. As scholars have often remarked (though sometimes with disapproval), the term *Byzantium* was itself coined by German humanist Hieronymus Wolf “to distinguish the Roman state ruled from Byzantium-Constantinople from the empire when it was ruled from Rome.”³ But it isn’t entirely fair to blame, or credit, Wolf with the term, even though his *Corpus historiae Byzantinae: Historia rerum in Oriente gestarum ab exordio mundi et orbe condito ad nostra haec usque tempora* (1557) brings the word “Byzantine”

into prominence.⁴ The *Corpus* is in fact something of a compendium of earlier histories, with his most substantial borrowings from Johannes Zonaras, a twelfth-century chronicler. The disapproval stems from the notion that by highlighting “Byzantium,” Wolf (and others) polarized the relationship between the traditional Rome of the West and Constantine’s New Rome. As a result, it was easy for later writers – including such powerful voices as Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Gibbon – to deplore the highly diverse Byzantine achievements as degradations, subsuming a 1,000-year culture into a theory of decline from high *romanitas*. Wolf’s aim in gathering together and collating Byzantine historians seems, on the contrary, to have been much more positive. Like all humanists, he probably hoped to retrieve genuinely valuable texts from a lost period, even if that period were the twelfth rather than the first or second century. Within a generation, some of the intellectual fruits of New Rome had been collated and anthologized by Wolf and his pupils in Germany, the Jesuits in France, and B. Vulcanius and Johannes Mersius in the Netherlands and Holland, as well as important Greek immigrants in Italy.⁵

As is well known, the fall of Byzantium in 1453 brought Greek teachers in significant numbers to the West. But even before that, Manuel Chrysoloras had come to Florence and “a few Italians, such as Francesco Filelfo, had sought out Greek teachers in Constantinople,” where in the 1420s he studied with George Chrysokokkes.⁶ Predictably, with added proficiency in the language, the humanist movement changed and expanded to include the entire breadth of ancient letters. Herrin claims that “there is a mystery associated with this lost world” of Byzantium, “partly because it does not have a modern heir.”⁷ But, although Western humanism can’t be called a genuine heir to Byzantine art, religion, philosophy, or language, the influence of a civilization that survived by aestheticizing Roman civilization in order to create a New Rome would not have been lost on the students of the new arrivals. Byzantium was not so much a progenitor as a model of charismatic management.

Alexander Kazhdan maintains that scholars have long proposed a somewhat ambiguous stereotype of Byzantium “not so much in relation to its ancient heredity as custodian of ancient wisdom and its path to the modern world. Another approach, remaining robust among the rest, supports the opinion that these same Byzantines considered themselves *Rhomaioi*, their nation *basileia Rhomaion*, and their capital Nuova Roma.”⁸ Greek was the national language of Byzantine culture, although the demotic differed from the written language, which in fact closely resembled ancient Greek. Kazhdan objects, not so much to the existence of the bifurcated stereotype, as to the degree to which Byzantium “is valued according to the strength of its capacity to adhere to its true heredity, to imitate it, and to preserve it in its purity. Every deviation from the ancient models,” he emphasizes, “has been understood as a degeneration, owed in part to the ‘perversity’ of Christianity, and in part to the weakness of the emperors.”⁹ But Kazhdan disagrees with this stereotype, largely insofar as it fails to take into account the inseparability of Byzantine Greek antiquity from Christianized Byzantium:

Originality was not a virtue, nor plagiarism a sin, and imitation – the notorious *mimesis* – was none other than a mode of expressing oneself. Antiquity

was an immense pasture in which to browse, and the forage, however much befell you, was nourishing and tasty. It's not surprising the Byzantines grazed in that field. But it is significant that they did so *consciously* and raised antiquity to the status of authority.¹⁰

(my emphasis)

The clash between heredity and conscious grazing in the field of the past mirrors the conflict between genealogy and imitation that I discuss in Chapter 3. Moreover, the obvious agency cultured Byzantines manifested in consciously *choosing* their nourishment from the “prato immenso” adumbrates the kind of action necessary to establish any cultural genealogy.

Most interesting, however, according to Kazdhan, is the complacent duality of Byzantine intellectual culture:

Classical antiquity, though pagan, though accused of moral perversion, was not remote for Byzantine intellectuals. To imitate it – “to play at antiquity” – was neither a joke nor a parody. The Byzantines did not recite the parts of Romans: at least in their own sense, they *were* Romans. And, in the end, this same attitude brought them to understand that they were slaves to their cultural heredity, trapped inside it.

(emphasis in original)¹¹

The Byzantines were clearly split between feeling they were Romans and being Greeks by heritage – trapped and enslaved by heredity. It's doubtful that early modern humanists felt trapped in the same way, despite their efforts to appear so. Nevertheless, the dilemma that faced Byzantine intellectuals, and puzzles scholars – “was the Byzantine borrowing from antiquity mechanical or selective?”¹² – superbly reflects Borkenau's notion of the “style” of cultural formation. Consciousness of that “nourishing and tasty” forage, the pronounced element of choice in selecting ancestors, and the pragmatic – if logically impossible – merging of genealogy with active imitation, all combine to provide a blueprint for later efforts at cultural genealogy. And, lest we forget, Byzantine intellectuals, like their humanist heirs, were not merely playing at antiquity, not merely reciting Roman lines, when they imitated Roman culture.

Troy

Throughout the *Aeneid* Virgil reminds his readers of the cost of founding Rome. Legitimizing transcultural descent turned out to be equally costly, as a consequence of similar empire-building ambitions. The founders of the modern *res publica litterarum* fancied themselves carrying their fathers on their shoulders and holding the hands of their sons as they brought intellectual light to the barbaric darkness of the Middle Ages. Therefore, and largely thanks to its fabricated nature, cultural genealogy suppressed a great number of influences and contributing factors, domesticated the kinds of irrational power that might threaten its

hegemony, and invented a present by re-“discovering” a past. Moreover, as in all mythicizing processes, the development and dissemination of a new cultural genealogy required the deliberate manufacture of discontinuities necessary to the redistribution of charismatic authority. It was a program, in Borkenau’s terms, comprised of “positing, defining, limiting, and excluding.”

The program was remarkably successful, not least because the new myth-makers had ample precedent for the manufacture of discontinuities and for the redistribution of charismatic authority in the ancient world they idolized. The Romans had made a tentative start and the early Christians had gone at it with no holds barred. The ostensible motive, whether you happened to be an Augustan Roman or a Church Father, was to fashion a selective set of continuities for the sake of constructing an acceptable cultural descent. The by-product of this selectivity was manufactured discontinuity, and, perhaps more significantly, an emptying out of gods and symbols, a stripping of values to make room for new divinities and new mores or ethics. The retention of particular figures from earlier periods – retention for the most part “in name only” – served to provide, above all, genealogical authorization despite the rejection of integral elements of the original gods and symbols. Cicero, Virgil, and Horace all manipulated Roman origins and Roman debt to Greek and Trojan culture, and sometimes sheer discontinuity set the standard.

For example, Juno’s notorious bargain with Jupiter to eradicate Trojan heritage from freshly conquered Latium might have served as a kind of poetic license for humanist authors to manufacture cultural discontinuity, and to preserve ancient cultural markers “in name only.” In light of Virgil’s vatic influence, one might reasonably suggest that the prototype for cultural genealogy is itself ancient, stemming from the myth of Aeneas’s storied flight and establishment of a new superpower. The myth has a long (and bumpy) pedigree, beginning probably in the fourth century BCE and continuing for centuries to its most memorable incarnation in Virgil’s *Aeneid*. Like most pedigrees, however, this one had its detractors. Not everyone along the way accepted Rome’s Trojan origins as definitive, or even as definitively Trojan. As Erich Gruen has shown, Greek intellectuals created the Trojan myth and used it to explain and justify the colonization of western Europe.¹³ Moreover – and strikingly, in terms of cultural genealogy – according to some commentators, the Trojans were themselves already Greeks.

Similarly, the origins of Rome were the subject of much speculation and legend in ancient times.¹⁴ The Trojans, the Etruscans, the Greeks all came in for praise as founding ancestors, when authors with different biases skewed the stories of Aeneas and Romulus to suit their particular angles. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, for instance, writing in the first century BCE, maintains that the Trojans are of Greek descent, that the Pelasgians are Greek, and that the name Tuscan has a Greek etymology (*Rom. Ant.* 1.30.3).¹⁵ The first book of his *Roman Antiquities* traces the origins of Rome backward through Troy to Greece. He explains that “the Trojans, too, were a nation as truly Greek as any and formerly came from the Peloponnesus” (*Rom. Ant.* 1.61.1). He then provides a divine genealogy beginning with Atlas and his seven daughters, “who are said to be numbered among the

constellations under the name of Pleiades” (1.61.1). Zeus married one of them, Electra, and had two sons, Iasus and Dardanus, the latter of whom had two sons who ruled in Arcadia. After a great deluge, however, they split into two groups, of which one remained in Arcadia and the other left the Peloponnesus, settling briefly in Samothrace and then moving to Asia under Dardanus (after his son died): “Disembarking in the strait now called the Hellespont, they settled in the region which was afterwards called Phrygia” (1.61.4). This last migration led to the building of Troy:

And Dardanus built a city named after himself in the region now called the Troad; the land was given to him by Teucer, the king, after whom the country was anciently called Teucris. Many authors, and particularly Phanodemus, who wrote about the ancient lore of Attica, say that Teucer had come into Asia from Attica.

(1.61.4–5)

After establishing the Greek origins of the city, Dionysius goes on to relate Aeneas’s descent:

Dardanus, after the death of Chrysê, the daughter of Pallas, by whom he had his first sons, married Bateia, the daughter of Teucer, and by her had Erichthonius. . . . Of Erichthonius and Callirrhôê . . . was born Tros, from whom the nation has received its name; of Tros and Acalaris, the daughter of Eumedes, Assaracus; of Assaracus and Clytadora, the daughter of Laomedon, Capys; of Capys and a Naiad nymph, Hieromnemê, Anchises; of Anchises and Aphroditê, Aeneas. Thus I have shown that the Trojan race, too, was originally Greek.

(1.62.1–2)

The line that runs from the Greek Dardanus leads through Tros to Trojan Aeneas. But, by Dionysius’s reckoning, the namesake of Troy is already of Greek descent. Dionysius goes on to show by similar genealogical reasoning that Rome was a Greek city because “the Aborigines were Oenotrians, and these in turn Arcadians”; because “the Pelasgians . . . were Argives by descent and came into Italy from Thessaly”; and because of the Greek Evander and the Arcadians, “who settled around the Palatine hill” (1.89.2). Dionysius concludes: “One will find no nation that is more ancient or more Greek than these” (1.89.3).

We find similar suggestions in Strabo, who reports a close connection between the Trojans and the people of Attica and even a common founder for both tribes (*Geography* 13.1.48).¹⁶ These authors wrote in Greek, even if they were writing for a Roman audience, and their bias is clearly toward Greece as the font of Roman civilization. Nevertheless their cultural genealogies must be acknowledged. The philhellenism of Dionysius perhaps acted as a counterbalance to the widespread hellenophobia of Roman writers. The typical Roman disparagement of the Greek personality was brought up short by the implication that Romans descended from

Greeks, or that Roman civilization, which prided itself on its hardness, had Attic origins. Still, the notion of Greek origins did not gain wide acceptance. Even the Greek Polybius, for example, worried about the “Grecification” of Roman society; he objected to the public display of Greek art, plundered by conquering generals, on the grounds that it “stood for a departure from the traditional education in martial valour.”¹⁷

In Roman hands the Trojan legend remained what might be called parahellenistic, manifesting the best of both worlds: a vaguely Attic heritage expunged somehow of the negativities of hellenism. Trojan genealogies were very popular in Rome during the late republic and early empire. Both Varro and Hyginus wrote works *de familiis Troianis*, contributing to the fad. It may be that these Trojan genealogies were designed to support the expansion of the patriciate “by providing fabricated genealogies for those whom Caesar may have wished to elevate . . . Appearance of one’s name on such a list would automatically confer if not real, at least bogus patrician status.”¹⁸ But, bogus or not, the prevalence of the genealogies is noteworthy, as is the existence of a widespread impulse to link Roman families genealogically to an antecedent (and now defunct) ancient culture. It should be noted, as Karl Galinsky remarks, that by the second century, “the Trojan genealogy had ceased being the prerogative of the imperial family and had become the common property of the entire Roman people.”¹⁹

Yet the hellenism of these ancient roots took various forms, or disappeared entirely. Livy, for instance, eradicates the exotic component from Trojan genealogy by claiming that Ascanius, legendary progenitor of the Julian line, was a product of Aeneas’s new marriage to Lavinia rather than Creusa’s son (I.1.11). (He later adds, as if to remain faithful to the famous tableau of Aeneas’s escape from Troy, the possibility that Ascanius had an older brother [I.3.2].)²⁰ But Livy also records the legend that the Greek Evander, exile from the Peloponnesus, was the inventor of the Roman alphabet (I.7.8), thus inextricably mingling hellenistic cultural inheritance with an essential component of Roman life embodying everything from poetry to law, oratory to ordinary speech.

Gruen maintains that the idea of a Trojan rather than a Greek derivation “fitted the Romans within the matrix of Greek legend that stretched back to remote antiquity while marking a differentiation and projecting a separate identity.”²¹ He concludes that “the absence of contemporary Trojans enhanced the appeal” of the Trojan myth.

The embrace of Troy . . . enabled Rome to associate itself with the rich and complex fabric of Hellenic tradition, thus to enter that wider cultural world, just as it had entered the wider political world. But at the same time, it also announced Rome’s distinctiveness from that world. The Roman upper classes welcomed incorporation into the cultural legacy of Hellas but preferred to carve out their own niche within it. They sharpened a sense of their identity and laid a foundation for a national character. Troy proved especially serviceable in this quest. Its glorious past lay in remote antiquity, its people no longer extant, its city but a shell of its former self. Troy persisted as a symbol, not a current reality.²²

This last point deserves emphasis. For all the possible indications of Trojan origins, there is little evidence of Troy in everyday Roman culture. We know of no practices, gods, rituals, or language specifically identified with Troy or Trojan myth. The cults of the Penates, of which there were two at Rome, are probably far older than the legend of Aeneas.²³ Poets and historians mention Troy regularly, but only as an ancient culture, an ancestor, and never in terms of its manifestation in contemporary life. Occasionally, as in Gruen's speculation that the shrine to Venus in the vicinity of Jupiter Maximus Capitolinus in Rome is "an unmistakable signal that she represented the national heritage," we can infer a connection between Trojan Aeneas, whose mother was Venus, and Roman daily life.²⁴ But, typically, this kind of evidence proclaims Trojan heritage (if in fact it does) without providing tangible proof of any particularly Trojan artifacts or inherited cultural practices.

It can be argued, I believe, that the Trojan myth undermines, even neutralizes, the cultural-genealogical relationship it pretends to establish. For example, the *Aeneid* ostensibly confirms a cultural link, indeed a descent, in the *translatio* from Ilium to Latium. But, when scrutinized closely, the later Roman relationship to Trojan civilization exists in name only. It is superficial and jejune. The Greeks completely destroyed Trojan culture: nothing was preserved of Trojan language, literature, painting, plastic art, architecture (despite the renowned walls and towers), philosophy, or law. Even religious inheritance is indistinct, despite Aeneas's arrival with his household gods and the equivocal evidence of temples to Venus. Roman culture calls attention to no Trojan inheritance beyond the legend of Aeneas who salvaged only as much of the cultural past as is represented by a Trojan father (buried before reaching Latium), a set of Penates, and a son by the now-dead Creusa. Practically speaking, if one wanted to eradicate and utterly expunge any material connection to an antecedent a more apt culture than that of ancient Troy would be difficult to find. As a prototype of cultural genealogy the Aeneas legend is anomalous, if not actually a contradiction in terms, because the Trojan-Roman myth provides a built-in safeguard against encroachment by the originating culture.

Virgil recognizes the anomaly of expunged Trojan origins and effectively mythicizes it in Book 12 of the *Aeneid*. Just before Aeneas's final victory over Turnus, Jupiter and Juno discuss the fate of the Trojans. A conciliatory Juno strikes a bargain:

"et nunc cedo equidem pugnasque exosa relinquo.
 illud te, nulla fati quod lege tenetur,
 pro Latio obtestor, pro maiestate tuorum:
 cum iam conubiis pacem felicibus (esto)
 component, cum iam leges et foedera iungent,
 ne vetus indigenas nomen mutare Latinos
 neu Troas fieri iubeas Teucrosque vocari
 aut vocem mutare viros aut vertere vestem.
 sit Latium, sint Albini per saecula reges,

sit Romana potens Itala virtute propago:
occidit, occideritque sinas cum nomine Troia.”
(12.818–28)

[“I yield now and for all my hatred leave
This battlefield. But one thing not retained
By fate I beg for Latium, for the future
Greatness of your kin: when presently
They crown peace with a happy wedding day –
So let it be – and merge their laws and treaties,
Never command the land’s own Latin folk
To change their old name, to become new Trojans,
Known as Teucrians; never make them alter
Dialect or dress. Let Latium be.
Let there be Alban kings for generations,
And let Italian valor be the strength
Of Rome in after times. Once and for all
Troy fell, and with her name let her lie fallen.”
(Fitzgerald trans., pp. 397–98)]

Jupiter’s response banishes Troy and Trojan culture for all time:

“do quod vis, et me victusque volensque remitto.
sermonem Ausonii patrium moresque tenebunt,
utque est nomen erit; commixti corpore tantum
subsident Teucri. morem ritusque sacrorum
adiciam faciamque omnis uno ore Latinos.
hinc genus Ausonio mixtum quod sanguine surget,
supra homines, supra ire deos pietate videbis,
nec gens ulla tuos aeque celebrabit honores.”
(12.833–40)

[“I grant your wish. I yield, I am won over
Willingly. Ausonian folk will keep
Their fathers’ language and their way of life,
And, that being so, their name. The Teucrians
Will mingle and be submerged, incorporated.
Rituals and observances of theirs
I’ll add, but make them Latin, one in speech.
The race to come, mixed with Ausonian blood,
Will outdo men and gods in its devotion,
You shall see – and no nation on earth
Will honor and worship you so faithfully.”]
(Fitzgerald, p. 398)]

For the Romans, this exchange between the gods provides a rationalization (in mythical-historical form) of the obliteration – or maybe merely the absence – of Trojan culture. Jupiter promises to add the Teucrian rituals and mores, but to Latinize them (“morem ritusque sacrorum / adiciam faciamque omnis uno ore Latinos”). This is more sinister than merely an Olympian recipe for a “garlic spread” of cultures: Jupiter’s statement shouldn’t be interpreted as *Roma est e pluribus una moribus*. Rather, this passage seems to describe a form of genocide, or an ethnic suppression so thorough as to force the Latinization of Trojan customs. This kind of unbridled license to eradicate and transform a cultural heritage not only provided a model for humanist constructions of transcultural descent, but also, tellingly, laid the foundation for the privilege of myth I discuss in the epilogue – a sense of privilege and license that led to charismatically authorized conquests of the Amerindian cultures.²⁵

Virgil’s readers need not have put much credence in his mythicized version of their cultural genealogy for the passage to have retained its unique force. The divine bargain represents a rare acknowledgment in Roman literature of the irony of claiming Trojan descent without manifesting any evidence of Trojan cultural inheritance – an irony that shouldn’t be lost on scholars of early modern society. Despite the ubiquitous humanist protests that, through proper *imitatio*, their work will transfer (*transferre*) the highest philosophical and poetic ideals from antiquity, the product they deliver expunges the essential meaning of the original. Jupiter’s concession to Juno is fairly ruthless: “commixti corpore tantum/subsidient Teucri” – in R. D. Williams’s translation, “mingling in stock only, the Trojans will sink into lesser importance.”²⁶ Williams adds that “*Subsidere* here means that [the Trojans] will sink to the bottom of the mixture.”²⁷

The Trojan-Roman myth lacks the quantum of nostalgia usually present in origin myths and mythical genealogies. Although Troy never quite disappears from the Roman symbolic field, it remains more a burden, or a blot, than a source of charismatic legitimization. Horace rejects any return to Troy in *Odes* 3.17, in which Juno proclaims that if Troy were to rise three times, three times it would be destroyed by her Greeks: she calls on the Romans, “too loyal and trustful of their power, not to renew the roofs of ancestral Troy” (“ne nimium pii / rebusque fidentes avitae / tecta velint reparare Troiae” 3.17.58–60; Bennet translation).²⁸ In a revealing passage at the end of the *Metamorphoses*, Venus (invoked by Ovid as “Troica Vesta,” Trojan Vesta) associates the Trojan conflagration with the murder of Caesar:

“aspice,” dicebat, “quanta mihi mole parentur
insidiae, quantaque caput cum fraude petatur,
quod de Dardanio solum mihi restat Iulo.
solane semper ero iustis exercita curis,
quam modo Tydidæ Calydonia vulneret hasta,
nunc male defensæ confundant moenia Troiæ,
quæ videam natum longis erroribus actum
iactarique freto desque intrare silentum

bellaque cum Turno gerere, aut, si vera fatemur,
 cum Iunone magis? quid nunc antiqua recordor
 damna me generis? timor hic meminisse priorum
 non sinit; en acui sceleratos cernitis enses.
 quos prohibete, precor, facinusque repellite neve
 caede sacerdotis flammam exstinguite Vestae!”

(*Met.* 15.765–78)

[“Behold what a crushing weight of plots is prepared against me, and with what snares that life is sought which alone remains to me from Dardanian Iulus. Shall I alone for ever be harassed by well-founded cares, since now the Calydonian spear of Diomedes wounds me and now the falling walls of ill-defended Troy overwhelm me, since I see my son driven by long wanderings, tossed on the sea, entering the abodes of the silent shades and waging war with Turnus, or, if we speak plain truth, with Juno rather? But why do I now recall the ancient sufferings of my race? This present fear of mine does not permit me to remember former woes. Look! You see that impious daggers are being sharpened up. Ward them off, I pray, prevent this crime and let not Vesta’s fires be extinguished by her high-priest’s blood!”²⁹

(F. J. Miller translation, 419]

Dardanian Iulus is Ascanius, Aeneas’s son from whom the Romans descend. Caesar is the high priest (*caedes sacerdotis*) whose death threatens the Trojan line. Venus regards Caesar as the last of the Trojans; the armed conspiracy against him is a reprise of the attack on Troy, the arrayed Greek armies plausibly represented by the dagger-wielding conspirators. Yet, even here, the association with Troy does not infuse present-day Romans with numinous strength. Trojan origins are emblematic of failure and martyrdom, a genetic stigma rather than a source of ancient charismatic strength. The Roman conquest of Greece may help erase that ancient stigma, as the *Aeneid* implies. But the descent from Troy remains a collective burden of descent.

Unlike the myths of descent propagated by medieval and early modern writers, the Trojan-Roman version of cultural genealogy offers the Romans a unique freedom to regard language, arts, civic institutions, ideology, and philosophy as utterly Roman *despite* – not because of – supposed Trojan origins. Nothing besides the tattered glory of Troy survives in Rome (or anywhere else), and ancient Roman civilization contains virtually no evidence of an inclination to establish a genealogical relationship with Troy in more than honorific reference. The loss of a material legacy – even the specious mourning of that loss – confirms the absence of a tangible cultural genealogy.

How different such an attitude is from that of humanists in the early modern period, who, more than any other group of authors, *en masse* determine to establish their cultural descent. From Petrarch to Vico, the chief use of origin myths and genealogies is to link present culture *materially* to a past culture considered in some manner superior. Roman works of literature and rhetoric, Greek

tragedy and philosophy, even such obscurities as the *prisca theologia* of Orpheus and Pythagoras – all are invoked as evidence that divine auspices and skillful execution have materialized in present work, that the very fabric of contemporary culture is woven from the threads of ancient cultures. Even the ubiquitous (and magnificently incredible) Trojan descent-myths which we find in medieval and early modern France, England, and Spain (the Habsburgs) are invoked, one must assume, not to establish a link to the obliterated culture of Troy but rather to emphasize parity with Virgil and Roman civilization. Thus the use of the Troy myth by post-classical writers should not be compared to Virgil's use of the myth, even though Virgil's use of ancient Roman myth is the source of their cultural-genealogical practice. For later writers, the point of a Trojan descent is to adduce specific attributes of Roman civilization, from literature to moral philosophy to political (or imperial) consciousness.

It might be argued, in contrast, that for Virgil and his fellow citizens the value of a Trojan descent was exactly the opposite. The very absence of Trojan remains in culture or politics – no Roman leader ever invoked Priam as a model, for good reason – would have made the Aeneas story doubly useful: Roman imperial successes proved the triumph of the martyred race of Troy over their oppressors, while at the same time it was unnecessary, indeed impossible, to acknowledge any tangible Trojan influence in Italy. Throughout antiquity, the fabric of Roman culture remains exclusively Roman, with Greek influence tacitly, if at all, acknowledged (and Trojan culture completely absent). As Spenser's translation of du Bellay puts it (in the quotation I cited in Chapter 1), "*Rome onely might to Rome comparèd bee, / And onely Rome could make great Rome to tremble.*" This sentiment, placing Rome alone at the center of history without resemblance or indebtedness, might well have been gleaned by du Bellay (a distinguished Latinist) from Roman literary remains, or indeed from Dionysius of Halicarnassus whose *Roman Antiquities* was translated into Latin and reprinted several times in the early sixteenth century.³⁰ But if du Bellay was influenced by Dionysius he ignored the latter's insistence that Romans were of Greek extraction.

It should be added perhaps that genealogies are not a staple of Roman literature. Du Bellay (or Spenser) was accurate in the assessment that Rome only to Rome might "comparèd bee." Literary genealogy is rare. We do not find Roman poets (or rhetoricians or philosophers, for that matter) accounting for their descent from ancient literary ancestors, and certainly not from Greek precursors. The habit of genealogizing, particularly in terms of cultural descent, seems to have developed much later. Even in late antiquity, despite such odd texts as Isidore's *Etymologiae* (generally known as the *Origines*), the practice of establishing a genealogy from the distant past down to a present custom or practitioner does not seem to have been a commonplace of what Cornelius Castoriadis called the cultural imaginary.

Greece

This is not to say the ancient Romans failed to acknowledge their relationship to the Greeks, whom they had mercilessly conquered. But the nature of that

relationship in the realm of intellectual culture was as vexed at the time as it is now difficult to characterize. By the first century BCE educated Romans tended to be bi-lingual in Greek and Latin and they unofficially adopted many Greek customs, particularly in cultural contexts.³¹ If Latin remained the language of administration and technical communication, Greek became the fashionable language of society, considered more refined than Latin and, as ancient Greek poetry supposedly demonstrated, more suitable to poetic expression.

Horace's famous remark "Grecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artis / intulit agresti Latio" (*Epistles* 2.1.156–57) ["Captured Greece captured her savage victor, and brought the arts to rustic Latium"] expresses a commonplace of Roman intellectual society in the first century BCE.³² From a literary perspective, Horace welcomes the Greek conquest of Latin arts – or so it would seem in this epistle. He notes with exasperation that ancient Roman metrics ("numerus Saturnius" 2.1.158) continued to be used for much too long until good taste banished them and Roman poets belatedly turned to Greek models. He adds, with disapproval, that "footprints of the rustic past remain" ("hodieque manent vestigia ruris" 2.1.160) and he implies that only a complete purging of the *vestigia ruris* will bring Roman poetry up to the Greek standard.

Horace's argument for a studied discontinuity with the cultural past could – and did – serve as a model for the humanists' rejection of the so-called "dark ages." The use of Greek verse to expunge Roman rusticity is a perfect model for humanists who were intent on refining the language (especially Latin) and the forms of poetry, rhetoric, and philosophy that had fallen into decay in the rude Middle Ages. But the story is not so simple.

Throughout the first century BCE, there was clear prejudice against Greek learning, and although Cicero and others studied in Greece, the attitude toward Greek culture was at best ambivalent.³³ In this regard, Kenneth Burke's celebrated *mot* – "When in Rome, do as the Greeks" – can be misleading: if Romans "do as the Greeks" then they do so discretely, without announcing themselves as *graeci redivivi*. Augustan ideals may retroactively mold the character and ambition of such figures as the Trojan Aeneas, but it is difficult to find in the Roman attitude toward Greek culture anything comparable to the humanist ideal of *romanitas*. The standard Latin dictionary (Lewis and Short) in fact points out that the word *Graecitas* does not occur until the post-classical period. There are several verbs in classical Latin, such as *graecari* (dep.) and *graecisso*, which mean "to imitate the Greeks," or "to adopt a Grecian manner." But these are used in disparaging contexts. The word *pergraecor* indicates self-indulgence and can mean something like "to run wild at a drunken party"; and the word *Graeculus*, meaning Grecian or Greek, is often used in a contemptuous way. *Graeca fides* means "no credit at all" and such adjectives as *levis*, *loquax*, *insulus*, and *fallax* are commonly associated with *Graecus*.³⁴ And, if that isn't convincing enough, add the fact that Varro rejected the letters Y and Z from the Latin alphabet, regarding them as *graecula*.³⁵

Horace himself casually disparages the Greeks as soft or lazy, suggesting that Roman army exercises might be fatiguing to someone "accustomed to Greek ways": "si Romana fatigat / militia adsuetum graecari" (*Satires* 2.2.11). Even the

Ars poetica does not embrace the notion of cultural descent from the Greeks, despite the well-known (and much-heeded) advice to Roman poets to master Greek poetic forms: “vos exemplaria Graeca / nocturna versate manu, versate diurna” (ll. 268–69) [“You yourselves, turn Greek models in your hand night and day”]. Speaking of tragic poetry, he acknowledges the significance of Greek literary experimentation and he admires the form’s early practitioners. But his discussion quickly moves to a description of the decay – in moral terms – of Greek tragic poetry, from its glorious origins with Thespis to the excesses following the Old Comedy: “in vitium libertas excidit et vim dignam lege regi” (282) [“its freedom degenerated into vice deserving to be ruled by the law”].

Horace might admire Greek models and praise Greek stylistic experimentation, but nowhere does he associate Greek literature with vertical time. Nowhere does he suggest that by adopting or imitating the Greek models, Roman poets will transcend their diachronic cage of antiquated Roman metrics by tapping into a numinous vertical power emanating from a Greek poetic inspiration. Eminently practical, Horace parses the technology of descent, intuitively recognizing a distinction between technology and content. But Horace sharply distinguishes Greek models from Greek content, and, it might be argued, from Greekness itself.

Horace’s censure of Greek license echoes the commonplace Roman prejudice against Greek morality reflected in such words as *pergraecor* and *graeculus*. That this prejudice should surface in the *Ars poetica* in the form of a rationalization of the decline of Greek literary value should strike us, in the context of the present study, as evidence that Horace resists cultural descent. Because Greek influence is suspect in his eyes, he urges native poets – the same ones, presumably who have been turning over Greek models night and day – to avoid following the Greeks:

Nil intemptatum nostri liquere poetae,
nec minimum meruere decus vestigia Graeca
ausi deserere et celebrare domestica facta,
vel qui praetextas vel qui docuere togatas.
nec virtute foret clarisve potentius armis
quam lingua Latium, si non offenderet unum
quemque poetarum limae labor et mora.

(285–91)

[Our own poets have left no style untried, nor has the least honour been earned when they have dared to leave the footsteps of the Greeks and sing of deeds at home, whether they have put native tragedies or native comedies on the stage. Nor would Latium be more supreme in valour and glory of arms than in letters, were it not that her poets, one and all cannot brook the toil and tedium of the file.—Fairclough translation]

The last remark, that Roman poets lack strict discipline, is reminiscent of the line in *Satire 2* contrasting Roman army exercises with leisure-loving Greek ways. It might be inferred that here, in the *Ars poetica*, Horace is admonishing Roman

poets for being too Greek not only in slavish imitation of Greek subjects, but perhaps also in their imitation of a notoriously Greek attitude toward difficult labor (“labor et mora”).

The message is mixed, however. Horace identifies wisdom (“sapere”) as the source of good writing and the “Socratic pages” (“Socraticae chartae”) as the place to find it. And he praises the Greek poets for their *ingenium*, given by the Muse, who also gave them eloquent speech (“ore rotundo”). He seems to admire both Greek openness to divine inspiration and the Greek social conditions that supported such openness (in the past): they were greedy for nothing beyond praise (“praeter laudem nullius avaris”). In contrast, he castigates the Romans for neglecting their own poetic genius and for tainting the Roman soul (or intellect, *animus*) with avarice and wordly calculations from childhood onward. The contrasting types of greed, Greek (for *laudes*) and Roman (for property), explain the differences between Greek poetic achievement and a Roman dearth of comparable achievement, brought on by the suffocation of native genius.

Yet even here Horace never introduces the notion of descent. Whereas this same sort of native poetic dearth will inspire fifteenth- and sixteenth-century humanists to link themselves genealogically to classical antecedents, for Horace such a linking is unthinkable. He no more expects Roman poets to rehabilitate themselves by establishing a Hellenistic (or Hellenic) lineage than he embraces anything akin to *graecitas*. The thrust of his criticism is chauvinistic: the comparison to Greek poetic success is meant to be all the more embarrassing to Roman poets because it is Greek. A less admiring admiration, or a more backhanded praise, would be difficult to imagine. Even the fact that the Greeks came first does not precisely redound to their advantage. They came first but lost their edge through moral (and then artistic) decay. They represent the past, *vestigia Graeca*, and the curious implication of the *Ars poetica* is that the Romans need not follow behind them, chronology notwithstanding. Rather, the Romans too can come first, through an utterly new application of native genius and native subjects to old Greek forms. And maybe, Horace implies, there will never be *vestigia Romana* because Roman feet (including poetic feet) will remain securely in place.

The Romans yearned for the cultural imprimatur of Greek civilization, especially in literature and the other arts (with the sometime exception of rhetoric where Cicero’s powerful influence shouldered aside the Greek rhetors, even if he referred to himself as the Roman Demosthenes).³⁶ Ennius was reputed to have constructed a genealogy from ancient Greek poets down to himself, but, with the exception of this lost family tree, fascination with Greek poetic models doesn’t seem to manifest itself in standard genealogical terms. Still, Romans clearly sought to preserve some relationship to the ancient *fontes*, but strictly on their own terms – and as far as I can determine, without the raging charisma-hunger found in later epochs. Cicero may speak of transplanting Greek philosophy “from the failing hand of Greece” to Rome, while Dionysius of Halicarnassus could claim that “Rome was a Hellenic state. . . to such an extent that Romans even outdid the Greeks in Hellenism.”³⁷ Hysicrates and other captured Greek grammarians of the first century BCE might have propounded Aeolism, “the theory that the Latin

language was largely derived from Aeolic Greek” (although they were probably trying to flatter their captors and there’s no evidence that the Romans, despite their sense of linguistic inadequacy, underwrote this theory).³⁸ But these comminglings remained speculative. For the most part, Roman authors and intellectuals affected a complacency about transcultural descent. In practical terms, as Elizabeth Rawson points out, “[i]t did not, in Cicero’s day, seem impossible even to go beyond the Greeks. . . in terms of content. After all, the Romans were fond of the commonplace that they improved all that they borrowed.”³⁹ Gordon Williams concurs: “within half a century [of 100 BCE] Greek culture was assimilated, dominated, and used to create a specifically Roman culture.”⁴⁰

It would be mistaken, however, to reduce cultural assimilation to practical terms alone or to gloss over the relationship among domination, cultural creation, and charismatic remythicization. Cultural domination is neither a seamless exclusion of the past nor a systematic revision. As with any “conquest” of cultural values, the victor’s possession of the spoils usually means, not dragging past values into the present, but, instead, forging new values that fit present needs. Cultural spoils are therefore equivocal, because they pit selectivity against manufacture.

Unlike Jupiter’s ruthless (and fictionalized) extermination of Trojan traces, a compromise accompanied the inclination toward discontinuity with Greece, because the main objective was to demonstrate a highly tempered interest in the culture of Hellas. As Erich Gruen need hardly point out, the situation of cultural inheritance was complicated. Rome wished to demonstrate “willingness to reach out to alien conventions to help shape her own.” “Yet,” Gruen goes on,

Roman receptivity to the culture of Hellas had its limits. This was no mere enthusiasm for or eager absorption of an eastern heritage. Rome stopped short of absorption. Her own interests took precedence. . . . Romans adopted the myth of Trojan origins rather than other reconstructions of their past, for through that myth they could do more than link themselves to Hellas – they could differentiate themselves from her.⁴¹

The act of choosing among possible cultural antecedents provided an indelible lesson for the humanists. Selectivity and compromise – concepts antithetical to ordinary family descent narratives – characterize the Roman-Trojan continuum and legitimize the practice of manufacturing a compromised version of discontinuity. The need to differentiate themselves from Hellenic tradition eventually fostered among the Romans a lively engagement in cultural genealogizing.

The intermingling of Hellenic and Roman traditions, indeed the artificial grafting of the one upon the other, commanded ingenuity and earned popularity. A paradoxical – or perhaps not so paradoxical – consequence manifested itself. As Roman individuals embraced Hellenic intellectual imports in ever greater numbers, the community felt a correspondingly greater need to define itself as distinct from those imports.⁴²

We should remember Gruen's term "artificial grafting": it is consummately appropriate in describing the early modern adoption of ancient cultural heritage – although, as Polixenes objects in *The Winter's Tale* (quoted in the introduction) the artificiality of grafting is anathema to the blood myth. Yet, in a figurative sense and because of the supernatural properties associated with it, artificial grafting describes well the humanist discourse of transcultural descent. Just as Romans felt a need to define themselves more distinctly at the same moment that they grafted their traditions to Hellenic ones, so humanist intellectuals were driven to separate themselves from the culture they emulated and to re-mythicize it. The humanists imitated the very ambivalence of the Romans in constructing their own cultural genealogy in the intellectual arenas so dear to them.⁴³

Were the *tour d'horizon* to continue we would find other forms of cultural ambivalence, multiplying examples prolifically, and indeed showing a good number of counter-examples as well. Philhellenism in Silver Age Rome was not unpopular, and Williams reminds us that Augustus and other emperors dressed in Greek garb at their villas.⁴⁴ Although the evidence is disputed, it is possible that among a certain class of Romans there was much less ambivalence about regarding the Greeks as forebears than might be suspected from the literary sources.⁴⁵

In a slightly different vein, during the movement called the Second Sophistic (first and second centuries CE) certain rhetoricians made a distinct effort to revive ancient Attic language and custom. Plutarch is sometimes associated with the Second Sophistic, as are, more regularly, Dio Chrysostom, Lucian of Samosata, and Philostratus. Their Hellenism occurred while Greece was under Roman rule and reflected a fierce national and cultural re-identification. Their method of rejecting both the present and the immediate past while embracing the styles and genres of more than a millennium earlier anticipates the kind of leapfrogging fifteenth-century writers would perform with their cultural genealogies. It has been said that some of the more enthusiastic participants in the Second Sophistic even tried to speak Attic Greek, rather than the contemporary dialect. There is much debate about the Second Sophistic – even its existence has been challenged – but for the moment it is worth noting the similarity between the nostalgic impulses of this ancient movement and the nostalgia of Renaissance authors.⁴⁶ For what is Ciceronianism if not an extreme case of nostalgic revival?

More or less at the same time as the Second Sophistic, however, and continuing for centuries to come, the Church Fathers, many also writing in Greek, expressly rejected the Greek and Roman texts that formed the basis not only of extreme Atticism, but also of the basic pedagogical standards of the Roman system. In a way, their rejection of Rome proves the principle of leapfrogging inherent in cultural genealogy. Men like the fourth-century poet Prudentius showed no nostalgia for the near Roman past, portraying a debilitated Rome "rejuvenated by Christianity."⁴⁷

Somewhat scandalously, the patristic writers adduced divine numinousness to their own textual inheritance, using what we might call para-literary texts as their

charismatic conduits. Here's Nietzsche on the subject, writing in a particularly vituperative mode:

Even in the midst of Greco-Roman splendor, which was also a splendor of books, in the face of an ancient literary world that had not yet eroded and been ruined, at a time when one could still read some books for whose possession one would nowadays exchange half of some national literatures, the simplicity and vanity of Christian agitators – they are called Church Fathers – had the temerity to declare: “*we, too, have a classical literature, we have no need of that of the Greeks*”; and saying this they pointed proudly to books of legends, letters of apostles, and apologetic tracts, rather as the English “Salvation Army” today employs similar literature in its struggle against Shakespeare and other “pagans.”⁴⁸

Nietzsche is describing a form of cultural genealogy comparable to that of the Second Sophistic. His “agitators,” the Church Fathers, consciously forced a discontinuity and violently re-mythicized the extant textual or poetic genealogy to suit their own charismatic purposes. The “books of legends, letters of apostles, and apologetic tracts” – many of which, like the myths of the Hebrew Bible itself, originated in different languages (Aramaic and Hebrew) under alien cultural conditions (different classes, levels of education, occupations, countries, laws, hieratic organizations) – were forced into the Procrustean bed of Pauline Christianity. Nietzsche's heated objection to the neglect of Greek and Roman literary works serves as emblematic of what might be called the chronic objection to cultural genealogical practice: its selective suppression of the plurality of influences and its narrowing of access to arbitrarily chosen charismatic sources.

In an article provocatively called “Did the Ancients have an Antiquity?” Salvatore Settis admits that “[E]very model based on the ‘death’ and ‘rebirth’ of antiquity is, of course, one of discontinuity.”⁴⁹ He goes on to debunk the myth of such discontinuities, citing everything from the renaissance of the twelfth century made famous by Homer Haskins to the Macedonian and Liutprandic Renaissances. Settis's subject is visual art and his main point is that the discontinuities we see are often historical delusions, flaws in record-keeping or publicizing. Yet he concedes that “at the back of every period of ‘rebirth’ . . . there is this abiding, and possibly unique peculiarity of Western tradition, the living presence, and *authoritas*, of antiquity.”⁵⁰ He then quotes a recently published text of Jacob Burckhardt, who, when referring to the “*Wiedererweckung (renaître)*,” or reawakening of art in the early modern period, notes the unique circumstance of artists linking themselves to “an extremely remote past, of which all sure evidence, both with regard to its art and to its civilization, had been lost.”⁵¹ Burckhardt emphasizes that early modern artists accomplished this extraordinary feat by force of will, showing a completely unfettered selection (*freieste Wählerei*) in establishing their antecedents.⁵²

The predicament for early modern authors was not as dire since the written record of past achievements still existed. There was more substance to Catullus,

Cicero, Quintilian, Horace, and Virgil than there ever could be to Myron, Zeuxis, Apelles, or the anonymous sculptor of the *Apollo Belvedere*. But the basic method of building a genealogy by sheer force of will and unfettered selection from antiquity occurred in art more or less at the same pace as it did in letters. Giorgio Vasari links the two as “liberal arts”: “I have come to the conclusion,” he remarks, “that it is inherent in the very nature of these arts to progress step by step from modest beginnings, and finally to reach the summit of perfection. And I believe this is so from having seen almost the same progression in other branches of learning; the fact that the liberal arts are all related to each other in some way is a persuasive argument for what I am saying.”⁵³ Vasari is arguing for a progression in the modern arts modeled on what he imagines to have been a progression in ancient Greek and Roman sculpture and painting. Although his argument attempts chiefly to demonstrate a mirroring of antiquity and the present, it is important to recognize its reliance on the concept of cultural genealogy. For Vasari, the very idea that there is progression in the *artes* – both the plastic arts and learning – depends on the model of a similar progression in ancient culture (despite the lack of ancient evidence). Vasari’s model of progression might be called an instance of *imitatio culturae*, the imitation of a cultural condition as a whole, with all the implications *imitatio* had in the early modern period. But I will discuss the ramifications of *imitatio culturae* in later chapters, in addition to the significant differences between painterly and poetic descent. For the present let me simply point out that underlying Vasari’s notions of progress and imitation is the inescapable fact of transcultural descent. Vasari might have seen “cycles of the great high cultures,” as did Borkenau, but his cycles are the obvious products of manufactured discontinuities while his progressions garner their authority from an unfettered selection of antecedents rationalized as natural primitives in skill and perception.

Notes

- 1 Judith Herrin, *Byzantium: The Life of a Medieval Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009) xv; see also Herrin’s *Margins and Metropolis: Authority Across the Byzantine Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013) xv.
- 2 Ibid. See also p. 8: “Lacking a traditional caste of established families who cherished their genealogies in the Roman style, Constantinople was more open to talent; newcomers who proved successful were rapidly promoted. This social mobility meant that the city experienced a less pronounced divide between aristocrats and plebians, although upstarts were always mocked and slaves continued to be beaten.” Radical suggestions of a meritocracy often emerge in early modern debate, as in Book One of *Il Cortegiano*, and Constantinople might have served the argument well.
- 3 Helen C. Evans, Melanie Holcombe, and Robert Hallman, “The Arts of Byzantium,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, N.S. 58 (2001): 6. See also Christopher Kelly, “Rome in Riddles: The Quiet Revolution that Is Rescuing Byzantium from the Calumnies of Its Critics,” *TLS* (Sept. 5, 2015): 3.
- 4 Hieronymus Wolf, *Corpus historiae Byzantinae: Historia rerum in Oriente gestarum ab exordio mundi et orbe condito ad nostra haec usque tempora* ([1557] Frankfurt am Main, 1587).
- 5 See George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, trans. Joan Hussey (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, rev. ed. 1969) esp. 2–5; and Herrin, *Byzantium: The Life of a Medieval Empire*, 321.

- 6 *Ibid.*, 332.
- 7 *Ibid.*, xiv.
- 8 Alexander Kazdhan, "L'Eredità Antica a Bisanzio," *Studi Classici e Orientali* 38 (1988): 139: "Bisanzio è stata vista non in quanto tale ma in rapporto all sua eredità antica, quale custode di sapienza antica e suo tramite al mondo moderno. Un simile approccio ha del resto robusto sostegno nell'opinione dei Bizantini medesimi, che consideravano se stessi *Rhomaioi*, il loro stato *basileia Rhomaion* e la loro capitale una Nuova Roma." My translation. I am indebted to Kazdhan's article throughout the following paragraph.
- 9 *Ibid.*: "Bisanzio è stata considerata e valutata in virtù della sua capacità di aderire alla propria eredità, di imitarla, di preservarla nella sua purezza. Ogni deviazione dai modelli antichi è stata intesa come una degenerazione, dovuta in parte all 'perversità' del Cristianesimo, in parte all debolezza degli imperatori."
- 10 *Ibid.*, 143: "L'originalità non era una virtù, né il plagio un peccato, e l'imitazione, la famigerata *mimesis*, non era altro che un modo di esprimersi. L'antichità era un prato immenso nel quale brucare ed il foraggio, per quanto incolto, era nutriente e sapido. Non sorprende che i bizantini pascolassero in questo campo. Ma è significativo che essi lo facessero coscientemente ed innalzassero l'antichità allo statuto di autorità."
- 11 *Ibid.*, 144: "L'antichità classica, ancorché pagana, ancorché tacciata di perversione morale, non era remota per l'intellettuale bizantino. Imitarla, 'giocare agli antiche,' non era scherzo né parodia. I bizantini non recitavano la parte dei romani: almeno nel loro proprio sentire, essi *erano* romani. E questa medesima attitudine all fine li portò a capire che erano schiavi della loro eredità culturale, intrappolati in essa."
- 12 *Ibid.*, 144: "Il prestito bizantino dall'antichità era meccanico oppure selettivo?"
- 13 Erich S. Gruen, *Culture and National Identity in Republican Rome* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992) 50.
- 14 There is a large bibliography on the origins of Rome. See, inter alia, A. Momigliano, *Roma arcaica* (Florence: Sansoni, 1989); Jacques Poucet, *Les Origines de Rome: Tradition et Histoire* (Brussels: Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis, 1985); G. Karl Galinsky, *Aeneas, Sicily, and Rome* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969); Jacques Perret, *Les origines de la légende troyenne de Rome (281–31)* (Paris: "Les Belles Lettres," 1942).
- 15 Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Roman Antiquities*, trans. Earnest Cary (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937–50). All references appear in the text.
- 16 Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, 8 vols., trans. Horace Leonard Jones (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959–61). The parenthetical citation in the text refers to Strabo's division within the *Geography*.
- 17 Alan Wardman, *Rome's Debt to Greece* (London: P. Elek, 1976) xiii.
- 18 Peter Toohey, "Politics, Prejudice, and Trojan Genealogies: Varro, Hyginus, and Horace," *Arethusa* 17 (1984): 7; 8.
- 19 Galinsky, *Aeneas, Sicily, and Rome*, 6.
- 20 Livy, *History of Rome [Ab urbe condita]*, 14 vols., trans. B. O. Foster (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919–59).
- 21 Gruen, *Culture and National Identity in Republican Rome*, 50–51; see Galinsky, *Aeneas, Sicily, and Rome*, 9–10.
- 22 Erich S. Gruen, *Studies in Greek Culture and Roman Policy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990) 31; see Gruen, *Culture and National Identity in Republican Rome*, 20.
- 23 Andreas Alföldi, *Early Rome and the Latins* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965) 258.
- 24 Gruen, *Culture and National Identity*, 47.
- 25 See Waswo, esp. chapter 10, "Poets and Colonizers."
- 26 Virgil, *The Aeneid*, ed. R.D. Williams, 2 vols. (London: St Martin's Press, 1973; rpt. 1985) 2: 498.

- 27 Ibid.
- 28 There is a passage in Suetonius (*Jul.* 79.3) attributing to Julius Caesar a plan to move the capitol to Ilium or Alexandria, but, in retrospect at least, the notion of moving from Rome itself seems absurd.
- 29 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2 vols., trans. Frank Justus Miller, rev. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916;1977) 418–19.
- 30 Dionysius was first translated in 1480 and reprinted in 1529 and 1532. A new translation was published at Basle in 1549. Robert Estienne published the Greek text in Paris in 1546.
- 31 See Wardman, *Rome's Debt to Greece*: “When [Scipio Africanus] was in Sicily before his invasion of North Africa, he enjoyed visiting the *palaestra* and even wore Greek clothes, with a view, perhaps, to making himself acceptable to the local Greeks” (xiii).
- 32 Horace, *Satires, Epistles, and Ars Poetica*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926; rpt. 1978).
- 33 See note 43.
- 34 H. Hill, “Dionysius of Halicarnassus and the Origins of Rome,” *JRS* 51 (1961) 89–90.
- 35 Toohey, “Politics, Prejudice, and Trojan Genealogies,” 10.
- 36 See Elizabeth Rawson, *Intellectual Life in the Late Roman Republic* (London: Duckworth, 1985) 64.
- 37 Gordon Williams, *Change and Decline* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978) 124. See Dionysius, *Roman History* 7.70 and 72.
- 38 Rawson, *Intellectual Life*, 55.
- 39 Ibid., 324.
- 40 Williams, *Change and Decline*, 108.
- 41 Gruen, *Studies in Greek Culture and Roman Policy*, 33.
- 42 Ibid., 169.
- 43 There are many examples of that ambivalence. One of the most famous, Horace’s remark “Grecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artis / intulit agresti Latio” (*Epistles* 2.1.156–57) [“Captured Greece captured her savage victor, and brought the arts to rustic Latium”], I consider at some length in Chapter 2. Another might be Cicero’s admirable equivocation in the *Tusculan Disputations*, where, speaking of the inheritance of Pythagorean philosophy, he manages to suggest the Roman readiness to accept Greek philosophy while he simultaneously minimizes the Roman debt to the Greeks. For the latter, see Nicholas Petrochilos, *Roman Attitudes to the Greeks* (Athens, 1974): 149; as well as the Introduction to Book 4 of the *Tusculan Disputations*: “multa etiam sunt in nostris instituta ducta ab illis, quae pratero, ne ea quae repperisse ipsi putamur, aliunde didicisse videamur.” [“In our ancient usages too there is much that has been taken over from the Pythagoreans, which I pass by, that it may not appear that we have learned from other sources the things we are thought to have discovered for ourselves.”] See *Tusculan Disputations* 4.2.3–5, trans. J. E. King (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927; rev. 1945) 330–31.
- 44 Williams, *Change and Decline*, 112; 122.
- 45 See Rawson, *Intellectual Life*, who records the scholarly disagreement with Gordon Williams’s conclusions.
- 46 See Graham Anderson, *The Second Sophistic: A Cultural Phenomenon in the Roman Empire* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Donald Lateiner’s review of Anderson, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 94.10.06 (1994); and P. A. Brunt, “The Bubble of the Second Sophistic,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 39 (1994): 25–52.
- 47 Cf. Averil Cameron, “Remaking the Past,” in *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*, eds. G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 1.
- 48 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1969) 143–44. Emphasis in original.

- 49 Salvatore Settis, "Did the Ancients have an Antiquity?" in *Language and Images of Renaissance Italy*, ed. Alison Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) 29.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 49.
- 51 *Ibid.*
- 52 Burckhardt's text appears in M. Ghelardi, *La scoperta del Rinascimento: L' "Età di Raffaello" di Jacob Burckhardt* (Turin, 1991): 147n. 10. I am grateful to Christoph Irmscher for his help with Burckhardt's original.
- 53 Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, 2 vols., trans. George Bull (London: Penguin, 1965) 85.

5 Demythology and vertical time

When does a genealogy of cultures begin?

The short answer to the question, “At what point in their history would cultures turn to other cultures to justify their existence *genealogically*?” is “sometimes.” But the longer answer is considerably more complicated, and in fact forces us to qualify even the short answer of “sometimes.” The conviction of transcultural descent seems to be stronger in certain eras and under the pressure of such things as ethnic chauvinism and royal succession. In terms of the early modern era, we can begin by saying that the uniquely humanist notion of transcultural cultural descent – specifically, that later civic and intellectual cultures, as opposed solely to religious cultures, are the hereditary descendants of prior intellectual cultures – is a function of widespread multiplications of vertical time. Stephen Jaeger maintains in *Enchantment*, his book on charisma in the arts, that “aspiration feeds on charisma, looks to role models and inspiring figures who embody the goal of aspirations.”¹ Genealogy is always aspirational. When the genealogical technique is applied to culture, the result is the transhistorical descent of role models transformed into art forms.

As I’ve indicated already, cultural genealogy has probably always existed in some form, but rarely as a collective ideal and never as an epistemological imperative until the early modern period. Reasons for the sudden predominance of the concept at that particular moment can be difficult to ascertain, as difficult (and slippery) as are justifications for the idea of the Renaissance. Among the many political and socio-religious reasons for the fixation on transcultural descent is, however, a possibility not usually put forth, that is, that the newly minted Renaissance awareness of clock and calendar time caused anxiety that the arrest of time represented by genealogy assuaged. This argument might seem counterintuitive to us, since we think of clock and calendar time as a form of stability. But in the early modern period, the notion of clock time as opposed to natural time fostered a sense of instability, of time slipping away. So, perhaps, the famous obsession with genealogy among the humanists and other Renaissance courtiers emerged not only as a means to wangle patronage but also as a desperately conservative attempt to stop the clocks by offering a permanent – and divinely approved – structure. From the fourteenth to the seventeenth century genealogical “logic,” if

we can call it that, was deployed to counterbalance the range of instabilities posed by the erosion of church power in secular government, the Reformation and its aftermath, and the inexorable rise of merchant-class power. Further, genealogical logic, and in particular transcultural genealogy, provided an immutable charismatic truth in reaction to the pressure exerted by the new attitude toward time that began developing at the end of the Middle Ages.

As numerous scholars have noted, time in the modern sense is a Renaissance discovery, newly fetishized (and mechanized) by early modern urbanites.² Broadly speaking, the medieval conception of time was based on a cyclical, organic or agricultural model in which the sense of urgency did not impinge. By the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, however, commercial activity (especially in Italy), in conjunction with increased dependence on manufacturing, led to the “discovery” that time had intrinsic value and that wasted time meant less production. Alex Potter sums it up this way:

The manufacture and exchange of goods is unrelated to seasonal or natural rhythms. Its pace can be quickened by human effort in a way that seasonal cycles can never be. Make more goods more quickly, get more of them to market and sell them in greater quantities, and you end up a wealthy man, that wealth being roughly proportionate to the amount of effort you have to put in, to how effectively you use your time. The human struggle with time began when sufficient people realised the possibilities inherent in this fact.³

As this struggle increased in importance and affected daily lives, the need to arrest physical time also increased. Genealogy provided an excellent means of achieving, or at least appearing to achieve, this arrest of time. The preservation of an idealized charismatic essence *intact* from an ancient source, *sub specie aeternitatis*, contravened the powerful threat of time slipping away. If life itself were fleeting, then at least such eternals as pedigree and custom would preserve the human link to divinity (and all that that entails regarding perennial survival).

Citing Benjamin and Paul de Man, Angus Fletcher has said, in a chapter called “Marlowe Invents the Deadline,” that “allegory is the traditional mode whereby narratives encapsulate the irresistible passing of time. In this regard, allegory is the opposite of ‘High Symbolism,’ where time stands still in moments of epiphanic unity.”⁴ Both ordinary genealogy and cultural genealogy, as I’ve said (with reference to Kolakowski), “arrest” time. Cultural genealogy in particular forces time to stand still by aestheticizing the past, by creating art forms that reflect Fletcher’s idea of “High Symbolism.” Arguably, the elevation of a fungible ancestor could be deemed an act of symbol-making. Such an act isn’t an allegorical narrative that “encapsulates” the passing of time. On the contrary, it freezes time and makes the past available in the present. The model for this symbol-making, as discussed earlier, is the flexibility and “epiphanic” alpha/omega nature of Jesus’ genealogy. But whether the humanists (and other practitioners) regarded their transcultural descents as collocations of epiphanic moments is less important than the fact that they studded their genealogies with cultural symbols imbued with the force of

epiphanic symbols, a force meant to hold time in place. Fletcher concludes his chapter with a meditation on time and tragedy. Speaking of “man’s powers,” he says, “there is something natural, but also diabolic, about trying to fix [them] as kinds of sight, for to see is to stop time, to limit by inventing a deadline, by wishing to possess it”:

[These powers] reveal the new world that Marlowe foresees – a world of busy, zealous, trivial pushing to encase beliefs and unbeliefs, as if they were material objects. Time is one dimension of movement that will not tolerate such a vision, in spite of clocks, in spite of the secular workday, in spite of useful measurements the clock makes possible. Time, finally, can only be thought.

Out of such mysteries Marlowe creates his tragedy of the intellectual. A rarity among great plays, *Doctor Faustus* is the story of a philosopher looking for a new philosophy, a hero ready to be reborn.⁵

Maybe Marlowe was feeling his own belatedness when he invented the Faustian deadline. Maybe, with what Georg Lukács called possible consciousness, Marlowe imagined the erosion of the contemporary worldview that was supported by the myth of cultural genealogy. Or he recognized the futility of trying to build a knowledge-based culture on imaginary “epiphanic” values. But, in any case, his tragedy of an antihero waiting to be reborn, poised on the brink of a new epistemology, should serve as a reminder that the creators of early modern cultural genealogy thought of themselves as gallant intellectual heroes – rescuers of both the material items and the spiritual values swept away by time. They expressed their heroic feats in genealogical terms – feats, not incidentally, that Giorgio Vasari later dubbed a *rinascimento* – because genealogy automatically provided divine charismatic auspices. Thus were they able to demonstrate, by associating themselves with the power of vertical time, how they had averted the (Faustian) tragedy of a historical deadline and been reborn as part of a chosen lineage.

Cultural genealogy stands on the threshold between descent as a natural process and descent as a manufactured ideal. In theory – if not in fact – conventional genealogy (most often practiced in the Renaissance in pursuit of aristocratic descent) lays claim to a natural process of continuity for its authority (as the family trees try to show, but as Weber recognized as something other than natural). In contrast, cultural genealogy claims a different path to divine auspices, and is manifest in a specific practice. Indeed, it often seems as though we are *expected* to identify the human agency at work in cultural genealogy, while aristocratic genealogy by definition and necessity can reveal no deliberate agency. (Many a herald lost his job for failing to observe this *lex genealogiae*.)

Despite their differences, however, both cultural and aristocratic genealogy depend on a unique combination of charisma and myth. Both “arrest physical time” and act as proof of “accumulation” – to return to Kolakowski’s terms. Genealogical myth offers a pragmatic application of this arrest. Change may be incorporated into the myth of descent, in the form of teleological prejudices, but, it will

be recalled, *accumulation* is the overriding motivation of genealogical survival – measured by continuity and time accrued. It is ironic, therefore, that in the sphere of *cultural genealogies* only the manifest forgeries of manufactured discontinuity produce the necessary justifications.

Beyond Seznec

That the institution of cultural genealogy itself originated in the Middle Ages, yet failed to be credited to that period, further complicates things, however. It is well known that the classical revival supposedly beginning in the fourteenth century deliberately suppressed its antecedents in medieval literature and culture. But it is less well known that the genealogical method by which Renaissance writers were able to blot out putatively dark-age civilization was in fact a method devised and put into widespread practice by that same dark-age civilization.

As Jean Seznec established, medieval writers considered themselves the cultural heirs of the ancients. He quotes Chrétien de Troyes on “the idea that France has garnered the patrimony of antique culture and virtue”:

Grece ot de chevalerie
 Le premier los et de clergie
 Puis vint chevalerie a Rome
 Et de la clergie la some
 Qui ore est en France venue
 (ll. 28–32)

[Greece had once the leadership in chivalry and learning; then chivalry passed to Rome together with the sum of learning, which now has come to France.]⁶

This passage comes from Chrétien’s *Cligès*, a *romanz*, which, according to Karlheinz Stierle, is the “manifesto of a new literary form opening a new and final epoch in the history of *translatio studii* [that] represents a revolution in the relation between Latin and vernacular language, in which for the first time the latter claims superiority.”⁷ He quotes a few lines further on:

Deux l’avoit as altres prestee:
 Car des Grezois ne des Romains
 Ne dit an mes ne plus ne mains,
 D’ax est la parole remese
 Et estainte la vive brese.
 (ll. 38–42)

[God had given it (the sum of knighthood and learning) to the others as a loan only. For of the Greeks and the Romans nothing more or less can be said. The word has been taken from them and the vivid flame is extinguished.]

“What is striking in this text,” Stierle remarks, “is not only the absence of any reference to the German claim for *translatio imperii*, but even more the fact that in this model of *translatio* the Christian religion has no particular importance whatsoever.”⁸ The important topic replacing Christianity for Chrétien is *cortoisie*, which lacks the usual trappings of divinity associated with other forms of *translatio*.

Stierle’s discussion is very interesting. He charts the function of *translatio* from the “posthistory of the Roman Empire” during the “spiritual imperium of the Christian religion” through Dante. His spatial designations seem to echo Auerbach:

Transfere, translatio, where it first appears in the Middle Ages as a central category of political and cultural theory, *almost exclusively refers to a model of verticality*. . . . The transition from a medieval to a postmedieval model of culture can be understood as a shift from vertical to horizontal dominance.

(my emphasis)⁹

The medieval “model of verticality” Chrétien revolutionized in his summary genealogy is transformed, according to Stierle, into a horizontal model. This refers mainly to the popularization of vernacular writing. But, as Stierle later acknowledges, the transcultural descent of learning and knighthood itself depends on a concept of Messianic vertical time.

It was precisely this kind of verticality, surrounded by the threat of horizontal (or diachronic) dominance, that the humanists sought to enhance with their cultural genealogies. That Chrétien and others had used this method in pursuit of different goals only added grist to the mill, making it easier to suppress the fact that writers of the Middle Ages, with considerably less fanfare, had begun the institutionalization of cultural genealogy. As hereditary cultural successions of the sort we see in the *Cligès* became increasingly popular among early modern writers, *their* cultural genealogies inflexibly avoided the medieval branch of the family. Even Dante, writing very early in the fourteenth century, establishes his literary indebtedness to Virgil by emphasizing the rarity, even uniqueness, of his connection to the ancient poet.¹⁰ Perhaps he wanted only to wrest Virgil from those who saw him as a magus, and wanted to declare himself the first verifiably Virgilian poet of the modern age.¹¹ But his attitude toward the preceding centuries misrepresents the facts, in the long run not only exaggerating the neglect of Virgil but setting a standard of misrepresentation that attached itself permanently to the ideal of transcultural descent. Stierle, who sees *translatio studii imperiique* subsumed in Dante’s notion of *figura*, asserts that “all these aspects of *translatio* are located vertically.”¹²

The shift in attitude toward transcultural descent cemented by such misrepresentations as Dante’s was brought to full flower by the advent of *latinitas* and *romanitas* as intellectual ambitions. We associate these latter ambitions with scholars and educators whose program of classical revival distinguished itself in range and material success from the continual classical revivals of the Middle

Ages. The propagandizing success of the humanists fostered a palpable sense of the difference between fifteenth- and sixteenth-century attitudes toward cultural inheritance and earlier attitudes. Yet we cannot ignore these earlier attitudes, above all because they attest to the persuasiveness of the genealogical myth.

Let me return briefly to Seznec. He remarks that the “long history of the gods” was a history not of death and rebirth but of continual transmission and absorption into different European cultures from late antiquity to the Renaissance.¹³ As I’ve already pointed out, I believe this form of cultural transmission reveals the emptiness of the so-called survival of the pagan gods. But it’s worth noting how much emphasis Seznec puts on genealogy in supporting his assertion. He notes that “the French of the thirteenth century believed that the heritage of antiquity was theirs by special right,” but he adds that “other peoples had long advanced the same claim.”¹⁴ He cites Paulus Orosius, a Spaniard who “boasts of being a genuine Roman,” as well as Gregory of Tours and Isidore of Seville, who saw themselves as members of privileged rather than barbarian stock. And Seznec identifies the literary method by which these hereditary claims are made: “This pride of descent, which is hardly ever absent from the learned writings of the Middle Ages, brings with it one curious consequence: in order to justify his pretensions, the scholar turns to the fabled past of antiquity for supporting witnesses, for ancestors and begetters.”

Seznec notes that in the search for justificatory ancestors “originate those ‘ethnogenic’ fables . . . which name a hero or demigod as ancestor of a whole people.” The myriad of descents from Troy are prime examples of such fables, beginning with Virgil’s *Aeneid* and continuing through medieval France to sixteenth-century England (and beyond). Euhemerism is the foundation of medieval descent from antiquity, and Seznec remarks that during this period “mythological figures are no longer presented as common benefactors of humanity,” but as “the patrons of this or that people, the parent stem from which the race has issued and from which it derives its glory.” He concludes that, in this context, “no break is discernible between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance,” insofar as both periods’ “consideration” of the pagan gods ensures their survival. This is a strong argument, and the literature, painting, architecture, historical writing, and rhetoric of both periods support it. Countless “survivals,” if we can call them that, are found in metaphors and images, analogies and even genealogies. Countless ethnogenic fables, both as large as Trojan descent and as small as the metempsychosis of the Pythagorean soul, appear throughout the long medieval period from late antiquity to the so-called High Renaissance.

So we must ask: To what degree are these ethnogenic fables and other examples of “ancestors and begetters” responsible for the form of cultural genealogy by which the humanists justified their entire program of intellectual revolution and curricular revision? This is a difficult question to answer in terms of degree. But it is certain that these earlier versions of cultural descent, though scattered and unsystematic, provided paradigms for the large-scale origin-hunting and revivalism by which early modern authors instituted cultural genealogy across the disciplines. We might even say that the humanists assimilated these earlier

paradigms and, *mutatis mutandis*, deployed them anew in redefining the disciplines as disciplines.

Nevertheless, paradigms notwithstanding, the continuity Seznec sees requires qualification. His notion of continual transmission does not fit all the facts. Even while a version of cultural genealogy seems to have existed for centuries before the humanists took it up with immemorial fervor, consciousness of transcultural descent does not seem to have been prominent in the minds of late antique and medieval writers, let alone to have had the comprehensive influence it later had on intellectual matters. Or, to put it another way, the version of cultural genealogy made manifest in humanist writing differed so dramatically from earlier versions that the continuity of the practice failed to make an impression. (This difference of course does not justify the omission of medieval culture from the humanist genealogies.) Earlier European cultures, especially during the Middle Ages, did not champion or enact cultural genealogy in a manner meant to influence education, poetry, moral philosophy, and the arts. This seems clear, if for no other reason than that the humanists created a considerable stir in intellectual circles when they attempted to do so. If the path had already been cut, then their detractors would surely have ridiculed the supposed novelty of their pose. But no one seems to have used the polemic that Europeans were *already* in possession of *romanitas* and *latinitas*, having inherited the full complement of ancient virtues in due course from the learned authorities of medieval courts, universities, and monasteries. And no one seems to have suggested that humanist pedagogy was already in place, that Latin competence was already sufficient, that Greek had been adequately assimilated, and so forth.¹⁵

While authors of late antiquity might have sought to establish beginnings and even to hint at etiologies, the self-styled humanist authors made every effort to close the gap between the mythical past and the actual present. They turned not only to pagan gods for their intellectual origins but also, significantly, to ancient human beings whose writing and conduct they imitated and whose charismatic authority they sought to inherit. This was not euhemerism so much as a belief in the accessibility of divine gifts to right-thinking intellectuals – a somewhat different ideal of charismatic descent from that of late antiquity and the Middle Ages despite the prevalence of ethnogenic fables. Humanism defined itself as a revivification of original forces in philosophy, poetry, rhetoric, and historiography, while lending its remythicized authority to such active pursuits as the foundation of cities, warfare, and courtiership. This impulse to inscribe all aspects of present culture into a genealogical myth of transcultural descent differs in its sheer ambitiousness from earlier versions of cultural descent – and perhaps this answers the question of degree I raised earlier.

The cultural-genealogical myth Renaissance writers refined and propagated has had far-reaching, even permanent, effects on contemporary civilization in the West. Concepts as diverse as evolution, canon formation, divinity, and the ethics of colonialism, in addition to many others, all reflect the influence of the humanists' institution of cultural genealogy. We can conclude that, in contrast to its role prior to the Renaissance, cultural genealogy has come to play an increasingly

architectonic role in the intellectual disciplines since the fifteenth century, providing a systematic rationalization of continuity, discontinuity, devolution, and progress.

Beyond *translatio imperii*

In Latin, the term *translatio* means both *transferring over* and, more metaphorically, *grafting*. Both senses of the term lurk in the early modern use of the term *translatio imperii*, the notion that ancient empires could be transferred over to modern ones and that their cultural achievements could somehow be grafted onto present-day culture. As far as it goes, the concept of *translatio imperii* adumbrates that of cultural genealogy, but, as I hope is already becoming clear, I think the latter concept subsumes the former. In other words, the idea of *translatio imperii* is inescapably dependent on the institution of the myth of cultural genealogy.¹⁶

The institution of the myth that later intellectual cultures are the hereditary descendants of prior intellectual cultures was gradual. Indeed, for all the flamboyance of poetic genealogies linking Ennius to Petrarch, Virgil to Dante, or Orpheus to virtually everybody; for all the crazy detail of the origin myths of cities built by gods; for all the strangeness of euhemerism and those ethnogenic fables – despite all these rhetorical pyrotechnics, cultural genealogy came to its present status through its gradual acceptance as a new medium, a new technology, whose practice revealed the *ethos* of the older medium. Cultural genealogy and its institution reflect two things: a desire to believe in hereditary intellectual authority, that is, a hunger for cultural descent *and* the ability to support the institution with systematic remythification. As an institutionizable notion, however, cultural genealogy is considerably more than the sum of its apparent motives and causes. Despite its irrationality, this process of institutionalizing hereditary intellectual authority has become a measure of historical reality. Our present society may not be as overtly saturated by the genealogical fashion as the humanists – although, judging from the proliferation of Internet sites, genealogical origin-hunting has lost none of its fascination – but there remains an underlying structure and, perhaps, delimitation in our conception of the past. This structure owes a good deal to unexamined notions of transcultural descent, and if these notions don't fully guide the Western episteme in a Hegelian sense, they remain lurking, as we've seen, in such places as the Latin motto *e pluribus unum*, the Nazi-Roman regalia, and the Orpheus statue at Fort McHenry in Baltimore.

Despite having been borrowed without attribution from pre-humanist writers, cultural genealogy is perhaps the most enduring myth of the early modern classical revival that we refer to as humanism, a myth that has repeatedly transformed itself to accommodate the intellectual self-consciousness of different periods and places. The humanists made it a central tenet of their literary program – almost always in tandem with *imitatio*, which is its near opposite – and their institution-alizing efforts in turn affected pedagogical, curricular, and artistic concepts for centuries to come.

Such longevity is in itself remarkable. Equally remarkable, however, is the fundamental place of literature in the development of cultural genealogy. Literary practice not only enacted the conviction of cultural descent, but, beginning especially in the fifteenth century, also fostered the dissemination and the institution of the concept of cultural genealogy as one of the epistemological verities. If cultural genealogy plays an architectonic role in the intellectual disciplines, as I think it does, then literature is the intelligence creating and sustaining that role.

Yet literature is not coterminous with cultural genealogy. The institutional authority of the latter should not be thought of as exclusively a literary phenomenon, even if we understand “literature” in the early modern sense to include poetry, history, and philosophy. As we’ve seen, other media, particularly painting, heraldic pedigrees, and canon law, enact versions of transcultural descent. If anything, in fact, it’s the literary practices associated with cultural genealogy that now seem primitive and incredible, and have been easy targets since the eighteenth century.

It is worth recalling, for example, that the penultimate chapter of Edward Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* begins with a skeptical discussion of Petrarch’s crowning as a laureate poet. Gibbon tells the story in the spirit of historical accuracy, but he is reluctant to establish any but the most exiguous genealogical connection to ancient Rome. His rationality is almost clinical and he deliberately undermines the charismatic ambitions of the young Petrarch, both in regard to poetry and to Roman inheritance. In fact, he regards Petrarch as the wrong choice for such honors: “Yet I may presume that the Italians do not compare the tedious uniformity of sonnets and elegies with the sublime compositions of their epic Muse, the original wildness of Dante, the regular beauties of Tasso, and the boundless variety of the incomparable Ariosto.”¹⁷ Gibbon seems to have little admiration for Petrarch’s Latin works – “the abbé de Sade calls aloud for a new edition of Petrarch’s Latin works; but I much doubt whether it would redound to the profit of the bookseller or the amusement of the public” (3.823n.6) – and, insofar as his laureate crown is based on his vernacular poetry, effectively begrudges him the honor. It is significant that Gibbon does this by rejecting the *descent* of the crown and thereby shattering the laureate link with Virgil and Horace:

From his earliest youth Petrarch aspired to the poetic crown. The academical honours of the three faculties had introduced a royal degree of master or doctor in the art of poetry; and the title poet-laureat, which custom, rather than vanity, perpetuates in the English court, was first invented by the Caesars of Germany. In the musical games of antiquity a prize was bestowed on the victor: the belief that Virgil and Horace had been crowned in the Capitol inflamed the emulation of a Latin bard; and the laurel was endeared to the lover by a verbal resemblance with the name of his mistress.

(3.823)

Throughout this somewhat withering appraisal of misapprehensions, Gibbon adds footnotes demonstrating the actual origins of the laurel crown. As it turns out,

he maintains, Domitian instituted the Capitoline games in 86 CE, and thus “the Latin poets who lived before Domitian were crowned only in the public opinion” (3.823n.10). So much for Petrarch’s descent in the tradition from Virgil and Horace. As a final *coup*, Gibbon, citing Pliny and others, adds that the latter-day Romans had the crown wrong anyway: “Petrarch and the senators of Rome were ignorant that the laurel was not the Capitoline, but the Delphic, crown. The victors in the Capitol were crowned with a garland of oak-leaves” (3.823n.11).

It remains to ask why, if Gibbon was so skeptical of Petrarch’s laurel crown, he should include this episode as a kind of touchstone in his history. Does he not seem to accept the descent from Rome without approving the precise vehicle of that descent? He certainly allows for the existence of the Italian Muse, and implicitly connects that Muse to her Roman antecedents. And his discussion of Petrarch ends benignly, acknowledging the link to Rome and Petrarch’s part in the rehabilitation of the city’s glory:

In the act or diploma which was presented to Petrarch, the title and prerogative of poet-laureat are revived in the Capitol after the lapse of thirteen hundred years; and he receives the perpetual privilege of wearing, at his choice, a crown of laurel, ivy, or myrtle, of assuming the poetic habit, and of teaching, disputing, interpreting, and composing, in all places whatsoever, and on all subjects of literature.

(3.824)

Completing his description of the ceremony and the literary privileges accorded to the poet, Gibbon turns to the nationalistic value of the crowning:

The grant was ratified by the authority of the senate and people; and the character of citizen was the recompense of his affection for the Roman name. They did him honour, but they did him justice. In the familiar society of Cicero and Livy he had imbibed the ideas of an ancient patriot; and his ardent fancy kindled every idea to a sentiment, and every sentiment to a passion.

(3.824)

“Ardent,” “sentiment,” “passion” – these are hardly the words of detached historical study, and Gibbon’s point seems to be that, deserving though he might have been, Petrarch’s embrace of Rome had more of “fancy” than hard-bitten reality in it. This might double as a critique of early modern ideas of cultural genealogy generally. But Gibbon, it turns out, does not fault Petrarch so much as admire his ability to forge of his new citizenship a link between the glories of the past and the “hope of the future”:

He loved a country by whose liberal spirit he had been crowned and adopted. The poverty and debasement of Rome excited the indignation of her grateful son: . . . in the remembrance of the past, in the hope of the future, [he] was pleased to forget the miseries of the present time. Rome was still the lawful

mistress of the world: the pope and the emperor, her bishop and general, had abdicated their station by an inglorious retreat to the Rhône and the Danube; but if she could resume her virtue, the republic might again vindicate her liberty and dominion. Amidst the indulgence of enthusiasm and eloquence, Petrarch, Italy, and Europe were astonished by a revolution which realised for a moment his most splendid visions.

(3.824–25)

The ruptured version of Roman descent demonstrated by the earlier discussion of Petrarch's crown melts into the *continuous* version of Rome, the transcultural version. Gibbon restores cultural genealogy to Rome at more or less the same time that he voices skepticism for the magical, or charismatic, markers of such a genealogy. He himself employs the medium of cultural genealogy to create an aestheticized version of the ancient city and his own version of its religio-republican *ethos*. Although Gibbon is infinitely more comfortable in the realm of realistic nationalism, he can still imagine the ideal of a continuous "virtue" of the republic traced down the centuries. This virtue is clearly a magical or charismatic quality, unchanging despite shifts in religion, philosophy, government, and law – and the sheer reach of time. Thus, perhaps unsurprisingly, the ideal of cultural genealogy remains alive in the *Decline* despite Gibbon's highly rationalized approach to the transformations of Roman culture.

It would be very easy to dismiss cultural genealogy as yet one more *grand récit*, and Gibbon as an innocent purveyor of a now-transparent attempt to legitimize and unify a particular body of knowledge. But such a dismissal does little justice either to Gibbon or to the *grand récit* of cultural genealogy, if that is what it is. Legitimization and unification were explicit ambitions of the humanist genealogists, foremost among them Petrarch. This is not to say, however, that while Petrarch might have been the most prominent and publicly ambitious of the early humanists, he was necessarily the first. Ronald Witt has recently set Renaissance studies on its ear, so to speak, by emphasizing the significance of the so-called pre-humanists. Still, even Witt admits Petrarch's centrality:

Setting Petrarch's Christianized version of humanism and his syncretic stylistic theory at the origins of the movement has distorted our perspective of its evolution between the generation of Mussato and Bruni. Petrarch was the first to formulate a program and a goal for humanists, but he was preceded by two generations of scholars and literary men with interests in and attitudes toward the ancients much like his own. Petrarch joined a scholarly and literary movement already more than seventy years old, and his own contributions built on an inheritance.¹⁸

Witt identifies Lovato dei Lovati, a Paduan, as Petrarch's most significant predecessor and as the progenitor of the humanist movement. This is an invaluable scholarly challenge, but finally, even if we accept Witt's persuasive evidence, it makes little difference exactly when the movement started. What remains

important is that the effort to link contemporary practice to past authority gathered the force of an incoming tide in the fourteenth century.

For example, Albertino Mussato, whom Thomas Greene sees as “a more considerable figure” than Lovati, had himself crowned poet laureate sometime before Petrarch. But this doesn’t mean he upstages him in the historical imagination. He is more of an intermediary figure whose Senecan drama, the *Ecerinis*, according to Greene, should be seen as “a protohumanist document” because, unlike earlier writers, Mussato begins to recognize the “specific foreignness” of the past:

Mussato’s intertextuality is no longer metonymic. His drama signals the loss of the medieval community of texts and the lengthening of a relationship in time calling for a different *translatio*, the span of a metaphoric bridge from one unlike realm to another.¹⁹

Cultural genealogy is nothing if not the medium for that “metaphoric bridge from one unlike realm to another.” It *is*, in a certain sense, the metaphor itself – the vertical analogy as opposed to the horizontal metonymy. From the fourteenth century onward, cultural genealogy subsumed the “different *translatio*.” Discussing intertextuality, Greene refers to the “neighborly community” of writing where “there is no perceived threat of anachronism, no clash of *mundi significantes*, no itinerary from one concrete historical moment to another.”²⁰ Petrarch introduced just that itinerary, and, although he wasn’t the first to see it nor did his generation bring it to fruition, he added a crucial element. He began to isolate the concrete historical moments, convert them into “epiphanic” experiences, and institutionalize them. This was the key. As J. B. Trapp puts it, “The passage from the charismatic to the institutional . . . always threatens. Humanists, let alone humanism, had not emerged in a form susceptible of definition in Petrarch’s day, though it was Petrarch’s life and his example that made possible the complex of attitudes we now call humanism.”²¹

The “passage from the charismatic to the institutional” was made in large measure by cultural genealogists. As we’ve seen in different examples, they struggled to identify their poetry, philosophy, rhetoric, and art with the grand narratives of the past, simultaneously establishing – and, at the same time, inventing – the very narratives from which they traced their intellectual descent. Gibbon tries to articulate his distance from those narratives, not least because he recognizes their ostentatious falsity, or “fancy,” to use his word. But the revelation that the narratives are false does not prevent him from accepting an architectonic view of the descent of Rome across cultures. His very denial of the details of Petrarch’s crowning eventuates in a tacit acceptance of Petrarch’s vision of a continuous Roman virtue.

The discovery of a *grand récit* should not be enough to stifle discussion. Charting the establishment, function, and transformation of the master narrative in rhetorical and social circumstances has much more value than merely its discovery as one among many ideologically driven narratives. Cultural genealogy transformed the Western or European episteme, but in the process it too was transformed. Not so paradoxically, the more embedded it became, the more credit it garnered.

Its origins in “fancy” were gradually forgotten, replaced by notions of nature and evolution. In the last chapter of the *Decline*, Gibbon speaks of the ruins of Rome. He again looks back to the early modern period as a valedictory, this time to the humanist generation just after Petrarch. He notes that the relics of Rome “are minutely described by Poggius, one of the first who raised his eyes from the monuments of legendary to those of classic superstition” (3.861). If I understand Gibbon’s distinction between “legendary” and “classic” superstition correctly, then I think he is referring to grades of myth, evolutions of mythological belief culminating eventually in his own rationalistic, *demythologized* state.

Demythology is the credo of most intellectual movements, chiefly in philosophy and religion. The so-called progress from *mythos* to *logos* characterizes such movements, as it seems to hover in Gibbon’s distinction between levels of superstition. Odo Marquard provides a valuable orientation:

Wilhelm Nestle’s successful title, *Vom Mythos zum Logos*, which was devised as a description of Greek material, seems – going beyond what its author intended – to characterize the course of the world history of consciousness, in its later stage, as a whole. As enlightenment, this history seems to be . . . the great process of “demythologization.” In which case myth, whatever else it may be, is at any rate this: something that we are on the point of having put behind us; and the fact that this is the case is either (position 1) good or (position 2) bad. These two positions – the more or less cheerful yes (from Comte to Horkheimer/Adorno and Topitsch) to the demise of myth, and the more or less energetic no (from Vico to the Heidegger school) to it – are more or less involved, if the world history of consciousness is supposed, at least in its late stage, to be the process of demythologization. But is it really that?²²

Marquard’s question reveals skepticism more difficult to apply to supposed periods of *logos* than supposed periods of *mythos*, the latter always determined in retrospect.²³ According to Marquard – and his view is particularly significant for the present study – “[T]his history of the process of demythologization is . . . itself a myth; and the fact that, in this way, the death of myth itself becomes a myth, goes some way toward demonstrating myth’s relative immortality.”²⁴ There is always a delicate balance between the continuity of cultural symbols and the demythologization of those same symbols. I speak specifically of such symbols as the Muses, the gods, the “legendary” superstitions which Gibbon mentions, even the very idea of a Pythagorean descent on which so much early modern genealogy is based. The humanists were often hard put to demythologize the symbols of their genealogical connection to ancient fonts while at the same time reinvesting those symbols with acceptable charismatic authority.²⁵

This reinvesting is analogous to remythicization, a term I’ve been using throughout the discussion, and which, I belatedly confess, I borrowed from another German philosopher, Hans Blumenberg. Blumenberg himself takes the idea from Nietzsche, whom he places in a symmetrical relationship with Thales of Miletus, the ancient pre-Socratic philosopher who, according to Blumenberg,

“had declared the exhaustion of the mythical mode of thought with his obscure saying that ‘everything is full of gods.’ . . . Though new gods, from distant places, might still turn up and be tried out, still there was nothing essential left to be added to the stock of people’s expectations.”²⁶ The connection to Nietzsche is provocative:

In a fine symmetry with Thales’s concluding sentence of the mythical epoch, Nietzsche, at the other end of history, as it were, spoke the concluding sentence of satiety with the dogmatic God of Christianity: “Almost two millenniums and not a single new god!” And to explain his disappointment at the sterility of what had once been a flourishing capacity of man: “And how many new gods are still possible!” These two sentences designate a new threshold situation that, seen as a need, comes under the heading of “remythicization.”²⁷

The humanists saw themselves in just such a threshold situation, a new epoch beginning to dawn from the dark age behind them. They used remythicization to create a relationship to the divine authority of the past. Although they never would have put it this way, they needed new gods to empower them, or more precisely, new myths of the old gods to transform the divine authority they claimed to inherit.

Here in this context, and only here, do we find Seznec’s “survival.” The humanists manufactured elaborate descents for their cultural practices from remote ancient sources, often with little more to link the two ends of the chain than rhetorical assertion. But the *medium* of their assertions spoke eloquently, delivering the message of charismatic descent and linking their fallen, barbaric age to the exquisite literary and philosophical virtues of the ancient font. The narrative of the transcultural medium remythicized the ancient sources by investing them with impossible auspices and preposterous intentions. Thus Orpheus becomes a Davidic figure, or Virgil a proto-Christian poet (in the Second Eclogue). In fact, the habit for such remythicizing was already formed by the steady Christianizing of the Hebrew Bible from the time of the Church Fathers onward, and indeed David was himself the subject of remythicization in the hands of the Evangelists, as in Acts 2:29–36, where, for example, the link to David’s covenant with the Lord, his seed producing generations, and the famed image borrowed from Psalm 110 that the Lord will make a footstool of David’s enemies are all transferred or grafted onto Jesus.²⁸ I’ve suggested that the genealogy at the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew sets a precedent in later societies for the transformation of exiguous *cultural* genealogies into a single line of descent linked by numinous, charismatic qualities. But the comparison raises many questions. Should we see the Jews of Jesus’ day and the Israelites of the Hebrew Bible more as one culture than, say, Petrarch and the ancient Romans? Are the differences of religion greater? of language? of domestic practice or education?

It is difficult to answer these questions precisely because the humanists’ remythicizations were so successful, as were those of the patristic writers and the biblical compilers before them. But there was a price to pay for these successful

remythicizations. Their extravagance defied reason, just as the notion of a numinous descent contravened the ideal of progress. Only a purely religious dogma, substituting faith for reason and permanence for progress, could transcend the difficulties of remythicization – and as the Reformation showed, even religious dogma was not always successful. In other realms of consciousness, most pertinently in epistemological areas, the proliferation of remythicizations eventually required sifting. Just as Gibbon saw Poggio as able to discern the classic from the legendary, so Gibbon himself makes a rationalist's point of distinguishing Petrarch's genealogical fancy – of a laureate link between himself and Horace or Virgil – from the exposed reality of that remythicization. Blumenberg observes that “[I]f one of the functions of myth is to convert numinous indefiniteness into nominal definiteness and to make what is uncanny familiar and addressable, then this process leads *ad absurdum* [to absurdity] when ‘everything is full of gods.’”²⁹ What he means is that the proliferation of myths as a means of harnessing supposed divine authority eventually leads to an anti-philosophical excess, an unanalyzable set of relationships antithetical to the purpose of myth itself.

The matter is still more complicated. Although remythicization seems to clash with modernizing notions of evolution and progress, it has also been associated with those notions since at least the fourteenth century. Similarly, although genealogy is by definition in opposition to evolution and progress, being devolutionary and regressive (in a charismatic sense, preserving an original charisma), cultural genealogy has come to represent an epistemological ideal of both evolution *and* progress.

Take, for instance, the transmigration of Orpheus's soul from archaic Greece to fifteenth-century Italy. This journey is recorded in a poem by Naldo Naldi tracing the Orphic *manes* down the centuries through Homer, Pythagoras, and the Roman Ennius to its latest incarnation in the body of Marsilio Ficino. The poem dramatizes a common fifteenth-century practice of remythicizing ancient charismatic sources.³⁰

. . . Ennius accepit in sua membra pius.
 Qui simulac vates mortalia vincla reliquit
 Et moriens campos ivit ad Elisios,
 Illic usque manens alios non induit artus
 Neve sacrum passus deseruisse nemus,
 Marsilius donec divina e sorte daretur,
 Indueret cuius membra pudica libens.
 Hinc rigidas cythara quercus et carmine mulcet
 Atque feris iterum mollia corda facit.³¹

[. . . Pius Ennius received [the Orphic soul] in his body. He gave up the mortal fetters and, when he was dying, the soul of the *vates* went to the Elysian fields. And remaining there continuously it clothed no other limbs, nor did a human footstep serve the sacred grove until Marsilio – whose chaste body [the Orphic soul] would gladly clothe – was given the divine gifts by fate.

And so with cythara and song [the Orphic soul] charms the unbending oaks
and again softens the hearts of wild beasts.]

This is a superb example of cultural genealogy resulting from the deliberate remythicizing of charismatic authority – and also, no doubt, an instance of what Anthony Grafton has called “the elegant nonsense of the Neoplatonists.”³² Not only does the transmigration of Orpheus’s soul preserve an ancient charismatic source by revivifying it in the present day, but the selectivity of the metempsychosis also reflects the genetic engineering typical of humanist authors. Genealogy collapses into culture and the structure of descent from the original charisma down to its present manifestation becomes tantamount to a series of moral and intellectual choices.

But what exactly is being preserved? This question, and others like it, must be asked of all cultural genealogies, even our de-genealogized post-Enlightenment versions of cultural descent. In Naldi’s genealogy the Orphic *manes* remains intact, preserved for the fifteenth century by a divine curator. Yet how does one distill the Orphic essence from its various and utterly distinctive incarnations? Clearly the criteria for this distillation cannot be moral, thematic, formal, political-ideological, linguistic, or religious. Homer and Pythagoras were as different in religious beliefs as Ficino and Ennius. Similarly, while Orpheus, Homer, and Ennius wrote poetry recognizable as such (although in different languages, with different alphabets), Pythagoras and Ficino were philosophers – certainly vatic but without formal poetic works to their credit.³³ Further differences can easily be found among the Orphic incarnations when we compare, say, the politics of republican Rome in the third century BCE (Ennius’s era) with those of ninth-century Greece (Homer) or sixth-century Athens (Pythagoras). The point is simply that Naldi’s preservation of charismatic authority somehow evades or suppresses these differences, permitting a genealogical continuum to seem plausible. But, aside from the rarified essence of Orphic charisma, virtually nothing tangible or concrete has been preserved.

A continuum of this kind, with its selective evasions and skipped generations, legitimizes its members with divine authority while also preserving a link to the distant past, even if what is meant by the past remains vague, intangible, and abstract. Moreover, as a consequence of the genetic selectivity, the ubiquitous dangers of genealogical descent can be avoided. As the family tree grows farther from the root and the original charismatic power becomes diluted, it becomes necessary to shore up the fragments against disaster. In this sense, the Renaissance revival or resuscitation of ancient charismatic *auctores* was a desperate measure, a self-conscious evasion of genealogical dilution and a massive preservation of transcultural authority. For this reason origin myths carry much weight in the intellectual theories of the period, as Naldi’s poem suggests. Naldi himself avoids the expected dilution of an extended genealogical descent by maneuvering the soul of Orpheus to skip millennia of generations while it waits in Elysium for Ficino’s *pudica membra*, the appropriate “chaste body” to inhabit.³⁴

Naldi’s continuum also serves another purpose, however, which is to disrupt the traditional continuity with the immediate cultural past. Implicit in the fable of

the Orphic soul waiting patiently in Elysium is the ubiquitous humanist critique of medieval, or “dark age,” culture. Evidently no philosopher or poet from Ennius to Ficino qualified for Orphic honors, not even Virgil. This gap is astonishing in its own right, and I’ve analyzed it more closely elsewhere.³⁵ But as an emblematic instance of cultural genealogy it is equally interesting. The selective continuum provides a nearly new beginning, a renewal linked by the most tenuous of genealogical abstractions both to a descent of ancient cultures and simultaneously to a divine power. Again we might ask why the link to the ancient origins is necessary and in what way fifteenth-century writers, as well as their counterparts in earlier centuries, found it so profitable to preserve the ancient charisma.

Homer’s peacock

Cultural genealogy, more so than ordinary genealogy, depends on a belief in the magical and usually divine auspices of lineage. Yet it should not be dismissed as simply an irrational notion. To the contrary, it is the product of a highly self-conscious process of reasoning and rationalization in combination with an irrational faith in the divinity and magic of origins. The combination serves to modify the irrational component, making manifest an example of “relatively rational behavior” (Weber’s phrase). Could anyone really “believe,” for instance, that the soul of Pythagoras descended through the ancient Roman poet Ennius to lodge at last in the body of Marsilio Ficino?³⁶ We find scores of similar genealogies in early modern texts, and all of them seem at once irrational and somehow obeying their own internal logic. For example, in his *Life of Petrarch*, Leonardo Bruni offers the following observation:

Tenne il Petrarca, mentre che visse, grandissima amicizia con Giovanni Boccaccio, in quella età famoso ne’ medesimi studi; sicché, morto il Petrarca, le Muse fiorentine quasi per ereditaria successione rimasero al Boccaccio, ed in lui residette la fama de’ predetti studi. E fu successione ancor nel tempo, perocchè, quando Dante morì, il Petrarca era d’età d’anni diciasette; e quando morì il Petrarca, era il Boccaccio di minore età di lui anni nove; e così per successione andarono le Muse.³⁷

[While he was alive, Petrarch had a great friendship with Giovanni Boccaccio, at that time famous for his own studies; thus, at Petrarch’s death, the Florentine Muses came to Boccaccio almost by hereditary succession, and in him resided the fame of earlier studies. And it was also a succession in time, because when Dante died, Petrarch was seventeen years old; and when Petrarch died, Boccaccio was nine years younger than he was; and so by succession the Muses go.]

This is a description of hereditary poetic succession within the same culture – within, indeed, the same city, given “le Muse fiorentine” – but its genealogical assumptions are nonetheless critical to understanding transcultural descent. Here as elsewhere, the line between metaphor and myth is blurred. Bruni’s “succession”

is both real (in terms of age) and metaphorical (in terms of poetry). But he mythicizes the succession by creating a narrative frame for it, choosing, predictably, to graft the metaphor of his compatriots' poetic descent onto the established and ongoing myth of the Muses' authority. While the basic assumption is irrational, combining a belief in divine inspiration with a further belief in its transportability, the logic of Brunì's poetic descent relations – that is, the obvious influence of Dante on Petrarch and Petrarch on Boccaccio – makes his hereditary myth seem, if not fully rational, then at least “relatively rational” in Weber's sense. The mythification of a charismatic succession, whether domestic or exotic, depends in Brunì's remarks on the transmigration of divine poetic authority from one generation to the next. And, although the overlapping ages of Petrarch and Boccaccio imply a generational traffic jam, we see once again in Brunì's succession what Kolakowski calls a “mythical form of time” characterized by accumulation and the arrest of physical time. Brunì's version of the arrest of physical time might not be as impressive as that obtaining in the Ennius–Ficino succession, but the principle remains the same. In fact, it is precisely because the principle is the same that the fifteenth-century writers were able to make the transition from easily defended domestic descents to more exiguous and debatable descents like the one in Naldo Naldi's poem.

Petrarch's laureate crowning, by all accounts, was a form of domestic descent even though it involved clear transcultural elements. Let's return to his own version of the laureation, as opposed to Gibbon's version. His Coronation Oration begins with a focus on the transcultural element of the laurel crown.³⁸ Petrarch explains to his Roman audience that he has chosen the laurel crown because the laurel is a sacred tree, “to be held in awe, to be revered.”³⁹ He means of course that it was sacred in an otherwise alien system of values and that he would like to transfer that alien sacredness to his civilization. Quoting the *Aeneid*, he notes that the ancients erected altars beside laurel trees and he lists three extraordinary qualities possessed by the laurel:

The first is this, that when a person who is asleep is touched with laurel his dreams come true. Which makes it singularly appropriate for poets, who are said to be wont to sleep upon Parnassus. . . . This is said covertly to show that truth is contained in poetic writings which to the foolish seem to be but dreams – the poet's head being wreathed with the leaves that make dreams come true.⁴⁰

The message that poets' dreams might be transcendent truths appeals to Petrarch, although the source of those truths does not seem to trouble him. He continues, if anything emphasizing the fitness of ancient beliefs to his modern era. His attitude gives a perplexing cast to his coronation:

[The laurel] is appropriate in another respect also, for in so far as it promises foreknowledge of the future it is fitting for Apollo as the god of prophecy – whence, as I shall say presently, he is feigned to have loved the laurel tree. Accordingly, since Apollo was held to be the god of poets, it is no wonder

that deserving poets were crowned with the very leafage of their own god, whom they regarded as their sustaining helper, whom they called the god of genius.⁴¹

The importation into Petrarch's postclassical episteme of Apollonian prophecy and foreknowledge as properties of the laurel should come as bit of a shock. Petrarch is of course attempting to associate himself with the ancient *vates*, the poet-prophet of Virgilian stripe. But more is at work beneath this passage than merely a literary association. There is the implication of a kind of cultural transference charting the passage of the charismatic quality of prophecy from ancient Greco-Roman (mostly Roman) culture to modern Italian culture. According to Aldo Bernardo (who is paraphrasing Guido Martellotti), "Petrarch's use of the ancients . . . seemed to reflect a desire to rest his thought in values that appeared eternal, thereby allowing him to flee for the moment the anguished sense of transiency and death that so permeated his Italian poetry."⁴² This statement is especially pertinent to the Oration. Moreover, it is noteworthy that Petrarch focuses on prophecy but ignores Saint Paul, who included prophecy among the nine *charismata* in 1 Corinthians 12, along with such things as wisdom and speaking in tongues. His neglect of the Pauline connection may seem curious, but, as Bernardo adds, "it is not uncommon to find Petrarch expressing his preference for something classical over something Christian."⁴³ His transference of an original charisma *intact* across the generations certainly "prefers" the pagan god of prophecy to the available Christian version. It may be that he expects us to see prophecy as a transportable endowment whose essence, like Naldi's Orphic *manes*, remains somehow accessible despite epistemic shifts and across the gap of dark-age ignorance. The Coronation Oration has been called "the first manifesto of the Renaissance" – *pace* Chrétien and Mussato.⁴⁴ If it is that, then it is also an explicit rationalization of ancient superstition – or what to fourteenth-century Christians would have been superstition.

Petrarch consolidates the transcultural elements of his connection to the laurel with an attenuated form of domestic descent, a metaphorical *translatio imperii* through time rather than space that would link the ancient republic to the hopeful restoration of Rome in his day. Here again we find evidence of the arrest of time. Petrarch's presence in Rome and his crowning on the Capitoline hill produce an identical, *arrested* relationship between the ancient past and the present:

In this very Roman Capitol where we now are gathered, so many and such great poets, having attained to the highest and most illustrious mastery of their art, have received the laurel crown they had deserved, but that now this custom seems rather to have been lost than to have been merely laid aside, and not lost merely, but reduced to a matter of strange legendry, and discontinued for more than twelve hundred years.⁴⁵

Not only will Petrarch resurrect the custom of crowning poets, but he will also rescue laureation itself from the skeins of "strange legendry." This is a typical

promise to demythologize the ancient past, to extract from the welter of legends and pagan myths the pure ideal of poetry or philosophy or prophecy. It is easy to see how the phrase “relatively rational” would apply to Petrarch’s stated intentions. But it is also impossible to ignore the continuing myth his demythology propagated. The result of the continuing myth – the new product of the demythologized custom of laureation – is a form of descent. Petrarch says: “I am moved also by the hope that, if God wills, I may renew in the now aged Republic a beauteous custom of its flourishing youth.”⁴⁶ The metaphor of youth and age unproblematically dissolves into a genealogical metaphor, and the demythology with which Petrarch stipulates his renewal becomes the focal point, or, more accurately, the new medium by which the remythicization of ancient culture is made manifest in the present.

To invoke McLuhan again briefly, the pattern we see in Petrarch’s program to revive a custom that has been “reduced to a matter of strange legendry” should be familiar. By practicing a form of transcultural genealogy he reveals the *present concept* of the custom to be “degraded and corrupt.” But his institution of a new, more accurate, and more systematic medium of recovery promises to turn the lost custom into a form of art. Petrarch might not have been the first to look backward, but the force of his aestheticized genealogies seems to have had a more enduring effect than those of his near-contemporaries like Lovati. The notion of revival, whether we speak of the Renaissance or renaissances (to use an old distinction), is a problematic concept in regard to genealogy. The devolutionary character of genealogical mythicizing conflicts with the supposed advancement in, among other things, religious morals that Christian writers claim in comparing themselves to pagan writers. The effect of this conflict, however, does not neutralize the genealogical impulse. Despite the putatively evolutionary evidence of religious and ideological advancement, the defenders of classical revival insisted on a simultaneous *devolutionary* status in the relationship between cultures. Consequently, poets, painters, sculptors, and even philosophers were able to gain access to the ancient charismatic authority as if they were genealogical descendants, while nonetheless making manifest in their imitations of ancient works the trumpeted Christian advancements that characterized their social milieux. As Petrarch puts it in a famous letter to Giovanni Colonna, “Let us be such in all things that above all things we may be Christians. Let us read philosophical, poetic, or historical writings so that the Gospel of Christ resounds in the ear of our heart. . . . To it all things must be referred as if to the loftiest stronghold of the truth; on it as if on a single immovable foundation of literary truths, human labor can safely build.”⁴⁷ This is a tricky business, a palimpsest of charismatic authorities. The progressive moral and religious ideal of the Gospel of Christ – its truth value to Petrarch – is somehow to be read back into, or to be recognized as the anachronistic foundation of, past pagan writings, so that the poets and philosophers from whom Petrarch would descend can be rescued from blindness to become useful models of imitation.

In her perceptive discussion of Leonardo Bruni’s *Dialogues*, Carol Quillen recognizes the importance of the humanist practice she terms “citation.” She begins

with an uncontroversial definition: “Citation – when humanists invoke the name of, quote from, or echo another author – can reflect different assumptions about why the past is relevant to the present.”⁴⁸ The assumptions she refers to are the clay from which cultural genealogies are shaped. Quillen continues (perhaps more controversially):

Most often, these assumptions authorize identification. We in the present are similar to those in the past, hence their words have meaning for us. Identification *downplays temporal distance* in an effort to foreground what has stayed the same. Such efforts legitimized the humanist desire to recover antiquity and sustained their fantasy – expressed by Petrarch, Bruni, and others but made famous by Machiavelli – of a community of great intellects able to converse across the boundaries of time and space and death.

(my emphasis)⁴⁹

The humanist “fantasy . . . of a community of great intellects” indeed required that authors downplay temporal distance. And the effort to identify with the past, as Thomas Greene and others have made clear, caused great anxiety. The remedy to that anxiety – at least in part – and the means by which temporal distance could be felt as *accumulated* time was to transform citation to genealogy. Quillen hints at this process, again discussing the *Dialogues*: “Bruni constructs a *genealogy* that acknowledges change over time, one that moves from Plato’s encounter with the Pythagoreans to Cicero’s encounter with (and differences from) Plato to the current debate between Niccoli and Salutati. This genealogy reinforces the definition of philosophy that Niccoli had given earlier and confirms Cicero’s place as that discipline’s Latin master. In other words, Bruni here uses *citation* to represent the past in its relationship to the present on many levels at once” (my emphasis).⁵⁰ In this passage, Quillen intermixes or substitutes genealogy with citation. This, I would argue, reduces the definitional value of both terms. More importantly, it diffuses the humanists’ vexed efforts to link themselves genealogically to an alien past tradition, and, at the same time, to create, not merely a pattern of citation and allusion, but an unimpeachable charismatic connection indemnified by a form of vertical Messianic history.

Because of the genealogical imperative, the stakes were very high for humanist authors. Citation alone doesn’t reflect the same sociocultural pressures. As Ronald Witt has shown in his most recent book, citation of past authors, and their invocation as guiding geniuses, began considerably earlier even than such pre-Petrarchan humanists as Albertino Mussato.⁵¹ The seeds of humanist practice can be found in poems, sermons, letters, chronicles, geographies, and especially the school curricula of the medieval period in Italy. But the humanist myth of transcultural descent, however well-sown from the tenth through the thirteenth centuries, only came to life later. The transmission of the elemental parts of this myth was due in no small measure to the focus and achievements of French literary culture and Provençal poetry, a debt determinedly left unacknowledged in later centuries. Once again, manufactured discontinuity rears its head: the genealogical imperative linking the

present charismatically to a Greco-Roman golden age required the suppression of proximate influences (even Dante). And, perhaps more pertinently, the systematic remythification of intellectual discourse drew its coherence from the transformation of what was largely a citational culture into what became an expressly genealogical one. As Witt puts it:

The flourishing intellectual landscape of Latin book culture, often referred to as French twelfth-century humanism, has been well charted historiographically. The term “humanism” aptly describes French culture in the period, in that its writers reflected in their work a belief in antiquity’s relevance to their own intellectual concerns. *Unlike later Italian humanism, however, the question of the extent to which moderns should strive to imitate ancient writers or develop their own means of expression remained an open one.*

(my emphasis)⁵²

I would not define the difference between the periods the same way Witt does. He suggests that the question of the “extent” of imitation being open makes twelfth-century French intellectual culture “unlike” Italian humanism. It may be Witt means simply that Italian humanists structured and categorized the debates about *imitatio* more meticulously. But, in any case, as I try to demonstrate in the next chapter, the question of “extent” remained open – and inflammatory – throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The medieval continuum deserves acknowledgment. Yet, even granting the medieval foundations of Renaissance learning, not until Mussato’s generation does there seem to have been a concentrated effort to inflate citation into something more. None of the pre-Petrarchans, however, explicitly propagated a filial descent from antiquity as the imprimatur of cultural pedigree. It was left to Petrarch to do this, and, implausible as it might be, he continues to be seen as the earliest and most prominent instigator of the kind of humanist nostalgia that produced genealogical affinity.

In matters of citation Petrarch was above all a genealogist. Although he claimed in a letter to Boccaccio that he only skimmed Ennius because he was too “alien” to digest, he nonetheless saw Ennius as a pivotal figure, simultaneously a link to Homer and a witness to his own transcultural descent.⁵³ In Book 2 of his *Africa*, Petrarch calls himself a second Ennius. Through his father’s voice, Scipio (Africanus) is listening to a prophecy of his fame:

Cernare iam videor gentium post secula multa
 Finibus Etruscis iuvenem qui gesta renarret,
 Nate, tua et nobis veniat velut Ennius alter.
 Carus uterque michi, studio memorandus uterque:
 Iste rudes Latio duro modulamine Musas
 Intulit; ille autem fugientes carmine sistet.

(2.441–46)

Far down the centuries to come I see
 A youth, Etrurian born, who will narrate
 your splendid story; he shall be, my son,
 for our renown, a second Ennius.
 I hold both dear, for both of them possess
 a memorable ardor. One of them
 brought rustic Muses, in rough fashion clad,
 to Latium, and the other with his notes
 detains them as they flee.⁵⁴

Because he was born in Florence, Petrarch is the “Etrurian born” youth (“Finibus Etruscis iuvenem . . . / Nate”), associating him with the indigenous Italian culture. The praise Petrarch lavishes on himself as another Ennius (“Ennius alter”) underscores the link between the ages, at least in terms of poetry: the first Ennius “brought rustic Muses” (“rudes . . . Musas/ Intulit”), as Ovid indicates in the *Tristitia* (5.424–25), and the second one keeps them in Italy.

Ennius himself appears in Book 9 of the *Africa*, where, asked by Scipio to speak, he bemoans the state of Roman eloquence and humbly apologizes for not being up to the job of singing Scipio’s praises. He suggests that, “currentibus annis” (9.60 “in future years”), a worthier poet may be born to sing his exploits; as we know from Book 2, this will be the youth of Etruscan origins, Petrarch. To his credit, Scipio claims not to want anyone but Ennius to sing his praises, not even Homer or Euripides were they available. This loyalty is commendable, if not well informed, but it is Ennius’s judgment regarding the unready state of Roman poetry that carries more weight. Petrarch is here echoing Horace, and perhaps Cicero, on the backwardness of Roman verse in comparison to Greek. Characteristically, he has maneuvered himself into the extraordinary position of being the rescuer of both early Roman and much later Italian poetry, which might in itself be a further hereditary reference, invoking Ennius’s “rescue” of Roman epic through introduction of quantitative hexameters in the *Annales* to replace the standard saturnians used in Roman epics.⁵⁵ In any case, Petrarch has written himself into the epic-poetic genealogy descending from Ennius, fulfilling two roles at once, past and present.⁵⁶

With similar boldness, Petrarch writes himself into Ennius’s famous dream of Homer (without the peacock). He would not have known Ennius’s poetry firsthand but through the citations of other authors, and he would have most likely come across reference to the dream in Cicero’s *De re publica* (6.10) or maybe also in Isidore. Ennius flourished in the first half of the third century BCE. His poetry has survived only in fragments quoted by later writers. His most ambitious work the *Annales*, told the story of Rome from Aeneas down to the Second Punic War, the end of which occurred when Ennius was a young man. As Peter Aicher explains, “The fragments from the *Annales*, as well as the ancient testimonia, inform us that near the beginning of his epic, before the narrative proper, Ennius shared a dream with his readers. In his dream Homer had appeared to inform Ennius that, by a transmigration of souls, his own soul, after an interim incarnation in a peacock, had been born into Ennius.”⁵⁷ Ennius was an innovator

in Latin poetry; indeed, according to Gordon W. Williams in the *Classical Dictionary*, the *Annales* “is perhaps the most remarkable achievement in Latin, and is the culmination of a literary activity so varied, both in prose and verse, that it rivals the achievement of the most distinguished Hellenistic Greek writers.”⁵⁸ To what extent Petrarch realized the importance of Ennius is difficult to determine, although he invested quite an effort in merging himself with Homer through a comparable metempsychosis.

In Petrarch’s much-expanded version of Cicero’s passing reference, Homer appears to the sleeping Ennius grizzled, eyeless, wearing fragments of a toga. Ennius follows Homer on a prophetic tour and almost the first thing they see is that same young poet, who as it happens is about to bind his hair with laurel leaves (an allusion to Petrarch’s laurel crowning at Rome). Homer recognizes the young man as last in a line of Italian progeny (“Agnosco iuvenem sera de gente nepotum, / Quem regio Italiae, quemve ultima proferet etas” [9.222–23]). This youth by his sweet song will call back the Muses who have been driven out of Italy (“Ille diu profugas revocabit carmine Musas” [9.229]). He will be called Franciscus, Homer notes, and his coming will be dearer to Rome than the birth of a son to a long-barren mother (9.246–49). These statements and others like them emphasize the long gap between Ennius and Petrarch, while simultaneously confirming both the poetic and the indigenous cultural link between them. The climax of the dream, however, might well be the moment when Ennius seems to reject Homer for Petrarch:

Pulsabar hanelo
 Pectore, visendi cupidus cupidusque loquendi
 Interea, et magnum – quis credere posset?—Homerum
 Dulcibus optabam verbis imponere metam.
 Iam michi carus erat te propter et alta relatu
 Celera.

(9.269–73)

My beating heart throbbed with desire to see
 this youth and to hold colloquy with him;
 wherefore, incredible as it may seem,
 I wished great Homer might bring to an end
 his sweet discourse. Already I held dear
 the youthful Tuscan, learning he would sing
 of you and matters lofty and sublime.

(9.368–74 Bergin/Wilson trans.)

The implication of Ennius’s impatience with Homer is that Petrarch’s song is more interesting, perhaps because it is new and also because it is Italian, about Scipio, and therefore close to Ennius’s heart. In any case, the symbolic import of Ennius’s impatience is that Petrarch will replace the tattered bard.

The mixture of rivalry and continuity in Petrarch's genealogical fantasy reflects a characteristic anxiety of transcultural descent narratives. It is difficult to take this rivalry seriously since Homer's place in the canon seems unshakeable (although it is worth remembering that Petrarch could not read Greek, and that at the time there was neither a widespread movement to revive Greek studies in Italy nor had Greek teachers started to arrive from the Byzantine East). Ennius's impatience with Homer may be emblematic of a turn to the Latin language and consequently to Roman heroic subjects. As interesting as the rivalry with Homer, however, is the manufactured discontinuity the link to Ennius implies. It seems that more than merely the subject matter of the Punic War connects the two poets – and something more than subject matter suppresses all the poets who came between Ennius and Petrarch. Yet the relationship, if not expressly genealogical, indicates, like Naldi's descending incarnations of Orpheus, a deliberate connection between an ancient poet and a modern one, between a defunct culture or civilization and the nascent one Petrarch represented.

Inevitably, there is a question of kinship between these separated cultures. But the order of priorities is skewed, as in all cultural genealogical relationships. The kinship of Ennius and Petrarch is based, for all intents and purposes, on subject matter and language, the latter of which is not Petrarch's vernacular but a form of *Kunstsprache*. That Petrarch's use of Latin constitutes for him a credo of *romanitas*, cementing a linguistic-cultural continuity with his supposed intellectual forebears, only confirms the deliberateness with which the putative kinship relationship was forged. To think, as Petrarch would have us think, that his intellectual formation is closer to that of Ennius than, say, to Dante or Cavalcanti or even Mussato, that the fragmentary remains of an ancient Roman poet provide a closer model of cultural kinship than any number of Christian medieval writers, is to accept the myth of cultural genealogy in its starkest form.

In a curious way, however, the paradigm of manufactured discontinuity manifested in the Ennius–Petrarch relationship makes sense. The discontinuity that suppresses association with intervening texts, languages, ideologies, and religious ideals has a commonsense authority that confirms the extent to which cultural genealogy undergirds our thinking about the past. Nothing, after all, connects Petrarch and Ennius besides Petrarch's volition. No aspect of the ideology or education or religious belief of third-century BCE Rome is extant in Petrarch's Italy, not least because concrete evidence of Ennius and his epoch was not available. But would evidence have mattered to Petrarch? Is his link to Ennius meant to represent a literal and complete connection? Or, as is more likely, does Petrarch mean merely to suggest a charismatic link between himself and the ancient poet, a similar sort of Pythagorean descent and reincarnation as that which Ennius imagined in regard to himself and Homer, and to that which, a century later, Naldo Naldi will imagine for Marsilio Ficino? Aicher observes that "In the transmigration of souls, the boundaries between individuals or personalities are not as firm as they seem; the *cognoscenti* perceive an identity that persists behind the different faces and manifestations. . . . The Pythagorean theory helps to create a linguistic environment in which the liberties that Ennius takes

in modelling Latin on Greek will appear not so much to violate a Latin tradition as to continue an older one.”⁵⁹

This same theory of Pythagorean descent flourished in the early modern environment of renewal and reshaping in the name of a continuous authority. As for Ennius in post-Homeric Rome, so for Naldi in fifteenth-century Italy: his poem traces the transmigration of the Orphic *manes* from prehistoric Greece through archaic Rome to Medicean Florence. While in Rome, the Orphic charisma lodges with Ennius, after first visiting Homer and Pythagoras, and Naldi has a valid reason for including Ennius in this crucial position. In fact, Ennius himself, Cicero, Isidore, and Petrarch faithfully recounted his importance as a vessel used for the transmigration of a poetic soul. Naldi’s inclusion of the archaic Roman poet thus preserves for us not only a typically humanist version of cultural genealogy, but also, more significantly, an antique source for the notion of transcultural descent.

The question remains the same for all three of these genealogical reincarnations: What exactly is being preserved if, to all outward appearances, virtually every form of ideology, religion, political structure, and ethics has changed? That poetic essence or Orphic divinity should supersede all historical specificities is not a new idea in the fourteenth century. Petrarch inherits that idea along with his poetic laurels. But we should acknowledge two fundamental components of the idea of poetic essence: first, that it is genealogical in structure, preserving an original charisma down the generations despite alterations in the cultural circumstances and the ideological-political situation of the inheritor; and second, that we give authority to the cultural genealogical myth and collaborate in the suppression of ideological-political differences between cultures when we leave unquestioned the evidence of transcultural poetic descent. Genealogy in this context obfuscates the reality of differences, linking and homogenizing under a charismatic rubric not only diverse but even antagonistic ideologies, *costumi*, religions, and indeed whole civilizations. We might go even further: the use of myths of transcultural (poetic) descent is part of a deliberate effort by writers to eradicate differences between cultures, to suppress the details of diverse practices and beliefs, and to trivialize what would be significant disqualifying factors in any historicized comparison of the cultures that are swept into the genealogical descent. At times this eradication grows from little more than ignorance of the historical circumstances of older cultures. At other times, however, and perhaps more often, the eradication is a deliberate act of suppression. Even in the case of Petrarch and Ennius it would probably not be accurate to say that Petrarch was entirely ignorant of Ennius’s historical era; after all, his subject, the Scipionic wars, took place in Ennius’s lifetime and his praise of Scipio represents a deliberate attempt to see cultural symmetry not only in poetic efforts separated by a millennium but also between ancient and current ideals of martial glory, imperial justification, and Roman triumph. The differences in religious motivations between the two Romes, in standards of humane conduct (Petrarch’s Scipio enslaves the Carthaginian nobles), in levels of war technology, and so forth, are all suppressed in favor of an idealized connection between the contemporary poet and his ancient subject matter.

This conflict between devolutionary genealogy and evolutionary ideology characterizes the myths of transcultural descent. The dialectical negotiation between devolution and evolution, between genealogy and ideologically inspired advancement, is reflected in the structuring of all cultural genealogies. The myth of time accrued and retained charismatic essence meets the myth of religio-ideological progress and the result is a new mythological architecture erected to accommodate the notion – or fancy – of lineage relations between cultures.

Notes

- 1 C. Stephen Jaeger, *Enchantment: On Charisma and the Sublime in the Arts of the West* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012) 19.
- 2 See Ricardo Quinones, *The Renaissance Discovery of Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972) esp. 3–27; also *Time: The Greatest Innovator*, ed. Rachel Doggett (An Exhibition, Folger Shakespeare Library, Oct. 1986–March 1987).
- 3 Alex Potter, “The Concept of Time in *The Winter’s Tale*,” *Shakespeare in Southern Africa: Journal of the Shakespeare Society of Southern Africa* 3 (1989): 59.
- 4 Angus Fletcher, *Time, Space, and Motion in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007) 56.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 69.
- 6 Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*, trans. Barbara Sessions (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972) 18–19.
- 7 Karlheinz Stierle, “Translatio Studii and Renaissance: From Vertical to Horizontal Translation,” in *The Translatability of Cultures: Figurations of the Space Between*, ed. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996) 59.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 58. Stierle’s translation.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 56. On “the complex history of *transfere imperium*,” Stierle cites Werner Goetz, *Ein Beitrag zur des Geschichtesdenkens und der politischen Theorie im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1958).
- 10 See note 30 of this chapter.
- 11 On Virgil as a magus, see the still valuable Domenico Comparetti, *Virgil in the Middle Ages*, trans. E.F.M. Benecke (Hamdon, CT: Archon Books, 1966), and John Spargo, *Virgil the Necromancer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934).
- 12 Stierle, *Translatability of Cultures*, 63.
- 13 Seznec, *Survival*, 319–20.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 19. All quotations in the next two paragraphs are drawn from pp. 19–20.
- 15 It has always been difficult to ascertain exactly how much genuine resistance there was to humanists, especially after the early fifteenth century. The resistance tends to be found in polemical works such as the *invectiva*, and, it must be said, is often ventriloquized by the humanists themselves prefatory to elaborate refutation in epistles or treatises. See, inter alia, Petrarch, *Invective contra medicum*: “Ante omnia quidem possem calumniam tuam paucis verbis eludere. Poetas impetis: quid ad me? Poetas respondeant, vel, quod est rectius, contemnunt. Non enim aut tu tanti es, ut tibi sit magnopere resistendum, aut poesis auxilio meo eget, aut ego me poetam facio.” [“To begin with, I could have ridiculed your slander with a few words. You assail the poets. What does that have to do with me? Let the poets answer you, or let them despise you, as is more just. You are not important enough to merit great resistance. Besides, poetry does not need my help; I don’t even claim to be a poet.” See *Invectives*, ed. and trans. David Marsh (Cambridge, MA: I Tatti Library, Harvard University Press, 2003) 82–83. Petrarch’s manifestly incredible claim that he isn’t a poet might indicate the truth of the “slander” accusation, and, in any case,

- despite feeling that the physician doesn't "merit great resistance," Petrarch writes an elaborate three-book defense of rhetoric and poetry. See also Giovanni Pico's letter to Ermolao Barbaro, June 3, 1485, discussed in Francesco Bausi, *Nec Rhetor neque philosophus: Fonti, lingua e stile nelle prime opere latine di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola* (Rome: Leo S. Olschki, 1996) esp. 13–37. There are many later examples of ventriloquized objections particularly in the *artes poeticae* of the sixteenth century, in Latin, Italian, French, and English. Occasional polemics against poetry or drama made their way into print, but most often the battles were over poetic doctrine: Aristotelian rules, rhyme, versification, decorum, generic conventions. There is a spotty record of more active, or more grandly symbolic, resistance such as Carlo Malatesta's smashing of Virgil's statue in 1397 (see D.J.B. Robey, "Virgil's Statue at Mantua and the Defense of Poetry: An Unpublished Letter of 1397," *Rinascimento* 9 [1969]: 183–203). But by and large, at least in regard to poetry, the volume of surviving defenses far exceeds the surviving attacks – a ratio that I think we might extrapolate to humanist reforms generally.
- 16 See J. B. Trapp, "The Poet Laureate: Rome, *Renovatio* and *Translatio Imperii*," in *Rome in the Renaissance: The City and the Myth*, ed. P. A. Ramsey (Binghamton, NY: MRTS, 1982) 93–130.
 - 17 Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 3 vols. (New York: Random House, n.d.) 3; 822.
 - 18 Ronald G. Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients: The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni* (Boston, MA and Leiden: Brill, 2003) 81. Although Witt challenges the accepted origins of humanism, he does not acknowledge anything problematic about the term *humanism* itself nor does he clarify what he means by a movement.
 - 19 Greene, *The Light in Troy*, 87.
 - 20 *Ibid.*, 86.
 - 21 Trapp, "Poet Laureate," 107.
 - 22 Odo Marquard, *Farewell to Matters of Principle: Philosophical Studies*, trans. Robert M. Wallace with the assistance of Susan Bernstein and James I. Porter (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 88–89.
 - 23 See Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) esp. 19–32. See also my *Charisma and Myth*, chap. 1, "From Barbaros to Mythos."
 - 24 Marquard, *Farewell to Matters of Principle*, 89.
 - 25 But see Borkenau, *End and Beginning*, 44: "The deep-rooted principles which characterize the opening phase of any new culture presuppose not merely a longing for faith, but the inner capacity for unquestioning faith in society as a whole. This capacity is specific to times that are directly accessible to the myth, hence to the primitive. Every cultural cycle may therefore be described as a road from the mythical, on which culture may be founded, to the nonmythical which disrupts it." Hans Blumenberg (in his *Work on Myth*) and Marquard pretty much deflate a theory like Borkenau's, which depends so heavily on the old notion of progress from the primitive mythical culture to the nonmythical culture that disrupts the deep-rooted principles of faith. Nevertheless the concept of cultural cycles is difficult to shed, as I noted in the introduction and as a glance at any history of the early modern period shows. It is imperative, however, in the kind of genealogical analysis I would like to perform, to recognize Borkenau's dependence on an insufficiently examined theory of evolutionary science. Like many others, he fails to consider both the force of devolutionary myth in the descent of cultures and the transformations of charismatic authority that make the dissemination of that myth possible.
 - 26 Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990) 25.
 - 27 *Ibid.*, 28.

- 28 For an interesting article on the uses of David in the sixteenth century, see Anne Lake Prescott, "Evil Tongues at the Court of Saul: The Renaissance David as a Slandered Courtier," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 21 (1991): 163–86.
- 29 Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, 25.
- 30 Perhaps the most dramatic representation of a long poetic hiatus between ancient and modern times occurs in Dante, *Inferno* 3, when the pilgrim meets Virgil. The Latin poet "di lungo silenzio, pareo fuoco" ("seemed hoarse from long silence"), a passage Cristoforo Landino (a charter member of Ficino's so-called Academy) glossed as proof of the dearth of perceptive readers during the intervening centuries. Just as Virgil waited silently (that is, unread and misunderstood) for Dante, Naldi's Orphic *manes* languishes in heaven until Ficino comes along.
- 31 Marsilio Ficino, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, ed. P. O. Kristeller (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1937–45) 262. Naldi also wrote a brief elegy to Ficino's painted lyre: "Ad Marsilium Ficinum de Orpheo in eius cythara picto." *Supplementum Ficinianum*, 262–63.
- 32 Anthony Grafton, "Quattrocento Humanism and Classical Scholarship," in *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms, and Legacy*, 3 vols., ed. Albert Rabil Jr. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988) 3; 51.
- 33 Despite not having left a written record of poetry, Ficino was considered a poet by his contemporaries, as seen, for example, by Naldi's elegy to Ficino's "cythara." Considerably later, Vasari included Ficino in his painting "Four Florentine Poets," and, for what it may be worth, Ficino thought of himself as a poet in the style of the poet he admired most, Plato. Nevertheless, it is difficult to classify him with Homer or Ennius, despite Naldi's implication that the Orphic *manes* languishes in heaven until Ficino comes along.
- 34 Orpheus also appears in the Elysian Fields in Virgil's *Aeneid* 6:645–47, and Plato's *Apology* 41A and *Republic* 2:363C. See Charles Segal, *Orpheus: The Myth of the Poet* (Baltimore, MD and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 23–24 and 203n.47.
- 35 See my "Marsilio Ficino and Vatic Myth," *MLN* 122 (Italian Issue) (2007): 101–22.
- 36 On the elasticity of the practice of belief, see Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination*, trans. Paula Wissing (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988). The answer to the question in Veyne's title turns out to be at least as equivocal as the question I ask in the first sentence of this chapter. Veyne investigates the actual constitution of belief among the ancient Greeks, concluding that myth meant something entirely different to them from what we now take it to mean: "The ancient problematic of myth . . . is bounded by two dogmas that were unconscious, for they were self-evident. It was impossible to lie gratuitously, or lie about everything to everyone, for knowledge is only a mirror; and the mirror blends with what it reflects, so that the medium is not distinguished from the message" (57) – which is reminiscent of what I said about the humanists' "style" in the Introduction.
- 37 Leonardo Bruni Aretino, *Humanistisch-Philosophische Schriften*, ed. Hans Baron (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1928) 67.
- 38 The Coronation Oration was not published until 1874 by Atilio Hortis, although it was available, so to speak, in a much-distorted forgery by the so-called Sennuccius Florentinus (Sennuccio de Bene), "first published in 1549 and many times reprinted in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries," according to J. B. Trapp. See Trapp, "The Owl's Ivy and the Poet's Bays: An Enquiry into Poetic Garlands," *JWCI* 21 (1958): 254; see also Trapp, "Poet Laureate," 105.
- 39 Ernest Hatch Wilkins, "Petrarch's Coronation Oration," *PMLA* 68 (1953): 1248; the translation also appears in Wilkins' *Studies in the Life and Works of Petrarch* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1955) 300–13; see Hatch's full treatment of the sources of the Coronation, as well as Dante's posthumous and Mussato's prior coronations, in his "The Coronation of Petrarch," *Speculum* 18 (1943): 155–97.

- 40 Wilkins, "Petrarch's Coronation Oration," 1249.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Aldo S. Bernardo, "Petrarch, Dante, and the Medieval Tradition," in *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms, and Legacy*. 3 vols., ed. Albert Rabil Jr. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988) 1; 118.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Wilkins, "Petrarch's Coronation Oration," 1241.
- 45 Ibid., 1245.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 *Ep. Fam.* 6.2 in *Rerum familiarium libri I-VIII*, trans. Aldo S. Bernardo (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975) 290–91. See *Le Familiari*, 4 vols. (facsm), ed. Vittorio Rossi (Florence: Casa Editrice Le Lettere, 1997) 2; 55–56: "Sic simus omnia, quod ante omnia cristiani simus; sic philosophia, sic poetica, sic historias legamus, ut semper ad aurem cordis Evangelium Cristi sonet . . . ad quod velut ad summan veri arcem referenda sunt omnia; cui, tanquam uni literarum verarum immobili fundamento, tuto superedificat humanus labor."
- 48 Carol Quillen, "The Uses of the Past in Quattrocento Florence: A Reading of Leonardo Bruni's *Dialogues*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 71 (2010): 372.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Ibid., 374. See also 375: "By crafting allusions that echo an ancient text and a modern author who himself has recalled that ancient text, Bruni contributes to the emergence of a common tradition and of a common yet polysemous language that links humanists to antiquity without subverting their authorial independence. From this perspective, allusion and citation establish textual relations and then use them to map temporal relations." While Quillen's description of the mapping of allusion and citation onto a temporal plane brilliantly describes a subtle textual process, the absence of descent relations to qualify temporal relations does not, in my view, accurately reflect the humanists' approach to either trope (if citation can be called a trope). Further, the process Quillen describes here can probably be found in the textual practice, or poetic production, of almost any era.
- 51 Ronald Witt, *The Two Latin Cultures and the Foundation of Renaissance Humanism in Medieval Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 81. Discussing "the long narrative poem *Gesta Berengarii imperatoris*, composed in Latin hexameters between 915 and 924," Witt observes, "Not only does the author reflect the influence of Virgil, Juvenal, Statius, and the Latin *Iliad* as well as of Christian poets, but he also displays a smattering of Greek learning." Regarding Gunzo's *Epistola ad Augienses*, Witt remarks that "The citations from major poets, such as Virgil, Juvenal, Horace, Persius, and Ovid, go beyond those found in Priscian and demonstrate an extensive personal acquaintance with the works of the poets themselves. . . . he may have known Quintilian and the still rare Pseudo-Ciceronian *Ad Herennium*, but Cicero's *De inventione* provided the basic structure for his work"(95). Note Witt's use of the word "citation."
- 52 Ibid., 317.
- 53 See Petrarch, *Le Familiari*, 11–13, and G. W. Pigman III, "Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance," *Renaissance Quarterly* 33 (1980): 13: "Petrarch distinguishes two classes of reading which he has done. On the one hand he read authors like Ennius and Plautus only once and quickly at that; if he memorized anything of theirs it was so alien to his own thoughts that it stood out in his memory as another's. On the other hand, he read and reread Virgil, Cicero, Horace, and Boethius. He digested their works so thoroughly that they entered his bone marrow, not just his memory."
- 54 Petrarch's *Africa*, trans and annotated by Thomas G. Bergin and Alice S. Wilson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977) 2: 572–80.
- 55 See Peter Aicher, "Ennius' Dream of Homer," *The American Journal of Philology* 110 (1989): 227: "Although the novelty of this change should not be over-emphasized – Latin had already been molded to Greek metrical schemes before the *Annales*,

beginning with Livius' dramas each of the ancient genres had something of an independent linguistic character, and Ennius' substitution of quantitative hexameter for the shorter, two-cola and possible accentual saturnian line constituted a clear break with the Latin epic tradition." It's difficult to say how much of the Latin literary tradition Petrarch knew of or intuited, although it must be noted that he would not have been aware of Naevius's epics.

- 56 As Bergin and Wilson point out, Petrarch was unaware of the *Punica* of Silius Italicus, which was not discovered until the early fifteenth century. He believed Ennius was his only predecessor on the subject of Scipio's war. See Bergin and Wilson, *Africa*, x.
- 57 Aicher, "Ennius' Dream of Homer," 227. Aicher cites "a scholiast on Persius 6.9–11" as a source for the dream, in addition to the fragments (227n.1).
- 58 See "Ennius," in *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, second edition, ed. N.G.L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970) 384.
- 59 Aicher, "Ennius' Dream of Homer," 230.

6 The blood myth and the bee

This chapter, really an inter-chapter functioning as mortar between conceptual bricks, analyzes the early modern blood myth with which previous chapters have dealt alongside that myth's unlikely counterpart, *imitatio*. Although not all humanist cultures focused with the same emphasis on poetry – for example, Venetian and German humanists had other outlets for their erudition – the technique of imitation, so much a part of the fabric of humanist poetry, was a driving force, or undergirding, of the new *studia humanitatis*. Its centrality to an investigation of early modern cultural descent requires no justification, as numerous previous studies have shown. The predominance among humanists of what we, in our idiom, would call literature includes history, learned epistles, and memoirs; the use of such “literature” for educational purposes is everywhere evident, and poetry often appears to wear the badge of highest achievement. This might be because poetry served as a crucial tool in the fabricated construction of cultural descent, linking the early modern world to “Greco-Roman splendor” (in Nietzsche's phrase). More than merely an adornment, poetry, along with new historical techniques and the revival of Ciceronian rhetoric, helped to define the educational and aesthetic landscape of humanism. Historians, rhetoricians, and poets alike depended on the manufacture of cultural genealogies to advance their new humanist agendas. The genealogies, however, were as shallow – yet just as persuasive – as the remythicalizations they embodied.

Cultural genealogy developed in the early modern period with a conundrum at its core. This conundrum was defined by the built-in conflict between devolutionary genealogy and evolutionary ideology, and its presence haunts transcultural myth. But these are somewhat abstract observations. At the practical level, on an everyday basis, the struggle between devolutionary genealogy and evolutionary ideology was reflected in the clash between the humanists' inveterate method of writing, *imitatio*, and their obsession with poetic genealogy. And it isn't enough simply to dismiss these mirrored conflicts by assuming that the voluminous lists of ancient poets and philosophers crowding humanist treatises, invocations, and letters are meant to be seen only as models of imitation. That would be to underestimate the cultural ambitions of humanist authors (an approach never prudent, regardless of how outlandish those ambitions seem). More often than not, as, for instance, in discourses on the origins of poetry, the ancient models of Amphion,

Linus, and Orpheus are magically transformed from static benchmarks to dynamic genealogical progenitors. Significantly, this kind of transformation is reminiscent less of ordinary genealogical practice than of *imitatio*, because the latter demands a conscious effort at imitating and transforming a predecessor. In contrast, as I've already said, conventional genealogy implies that a charismatic essence descends intact from an earlier generation without any conscious effort on the part of the present heir.

In other words, the humanists effectively ignored the problems inherent in trying to form a knowledge-based culture under the auspices of charismatic descent. Both genealogy and *imitatio* were new technologies in the early modern period, despite the use and theorization of *imitatio* in antiquity. As with the stricter genealogical charting of the period, the practice of *imitatio* was instituted as a new and modernized technique, adapted from the *technē* of ancient authorities such as Aristotle, Seneca, and Horace. But it was a vexed and controversial subject among the humanists, as countless fourteenth- and fifteenth-century treatises attest (not to mention the fiery ancients and moderns debate in seventeenth-century France and England). The theories, polemics, and long Renaissance itinerary of this ancient Roman practice have generated immense modern scholarship on figures ranging from Petrarch to Poliziano, Du Bellay to Ben Jonson. My aim in this chapter, however, will not be to review the scholarship in detail. This has already been done with exceptional diligence.¹ And, in any case, I find it difficult to generalize about the different theorists. If a form of Ciceronianism eventually won the day, many authors, including Petrarch, Salutati, Poliziano in his famous first epistle to Cortesi, and later Gianfrancesco Pico, propounded eclecticism in imitation.² In the sixteenth century, as Joann Dellaneva and Brian Duvick note, "Erasmus ridiculed the strict Ciceronians and championed the Eclectics."³ And while the fanatical Ciceronians have quite a bit in common, the militantly anti-Ciceronians, the Aristotelians, the Erasmians, and anti-Erasmians all contributed their own distinctive explanations of the practice of imitation. Inevitably, each version constitutes a new interpretation, a revision, supported by metaphors and examples incompatible with other versions, even when the authors claim to be in agreement.

An inescapable fact emerges from the theories on *imitatio*, a fact crucial to understanding the myth of transcultural descent. Whether an author was vociferous in propounding eclecticism, or, at the opposite pole, stood firm in pledging to use only words found in a single ancient source (such as Cicero), *imitatio* remained consummately a matter of agency and choice. It was, therefore, completely incompatible with the charismatic ideals of traditional heredity and ordinary family genealogy. In contrast, *imitatio* was snugly compatible with cultural genealogy. We could say cultural genealogy and early modern imitation were tailor-made for each other. But it would probably be more accurate to say that, in the symbiotic way of most social institutions, they *tailor-made each other*. The reason for this looking-glass compatibility, as I discuss later, returns us to McLuhan's idea that a new technological environment makes an art form of its predecessor.

Quintilian the theologian

Probably the most popular metaphor for *imitatio* was that of bees gathering from the flowers, digesting what they'd gathered, and producing honey. Although, as Dellaneva and Duvick point out, "Quintilian seems to be the favored source for many Renaissance metaphors of imitative theory, few of these images actually originated with him and can often be found in the earlier writings of Seneca and Horace."⁴ Quintilian's use of the apian metaphor, though maybe not original, is nonetheless interesting, if only because he uses it to blur the line between natural and supernatural skills. His bees are nestled among an unusual array of complementary analogies, each illustrating a transformative process.⁵ They are *muta animalia*, "dumb" or "mute" honey-producing insects. His reference is an analogy atop another analogy, growing from a comparison of the perfect orator with the content of pharmacological compounds:

Nisi forte antidotos quidem atque alia, quae oculis aut vulneribus medentur, ex multis atque interim contrariis quoque inter se effectibus componi videmus quorum ex diversis fit una illa mixtura, quae nulli earum similis est, ex quibus constat, sed proprias vires ex omnibus sumit; et muta animalia mellis illum inimitabilem humanae rationi saporem vario florum ac sucorum genere perficiunt.

(1.10.6–7)

I may draw a parallel from the use of antidotes and other remedies applied to the eyes or to wounds. We know that these are composed of ingredients which produce many and sometimes contrary effects, but mixed together they make a single compound resembling no one of its component parts: *so too dumb insects produce honey*, whose taste is beyond the skill of man to imitate, from different kinds of flowers and juices.

(my emphasis)

The act of composition in mixing remedies is consummately one of choice and discernment, at least within the limits of the *pharmakon*. But things get trickier when Quintilian alludes to "*muta animalia*." They gather from "different kinds of flowers and juices" ["vario florum ac sucorum genere"], but their transformative process can't be imitated. Further – and this is the tricky part – Quintilian implies that the insects themselves are unaware of the full extent of the process, that, as with any other group of foods, they digest the flowers without knowing how they digest and without true agency in or responsibility for the production of the "inimitabilem humanae rationi saporem" ("taste inimitable by human reason [or skill]").⁶ And not only insects are deprived of agency. Quintilian builds to an analogy with the ideal orator: "Shall we marvel then, if oratory, the highest gift of providence to man, needs the assistance of many arts, which, although they do not reveal or intrude themselves in actual speaking, supply hidden forces and make their silent presence felt?" ["nos mirabimur, si oratio, qua nihil praestantius

homini dedit providentia, pluribus artibus egeat, quae, etiam cum se non ostendunt in dicendo nec proferunt, vim tamen occultam suggerunt et tacitae quoque sentiuntur?" 1.10.7].

Overlooked in modern criticism, I suspect, is the resemblance of Quintilian's "hidden forces" and "silent presences" to such phenomena as *furor poeticus* and *furor divinus*. For Quintilian, superior oratory had the prestige and wisdom of philosophy, and consequently he saw a parallel between the orator and the *poeta-theologus*. What we regard as pure technique when analyzing *imitatio*, Quintilian seemed to think of as a mixture of technique and involuntary charismatic infusion, a kind of numinous pharmacological compound constituting the ideal orator. This strange mixture, counterintuitive as it might seem to us, was by no means alien to humanist authors. They evidently accepted the seasoning of supernatural powers as normal, even while they considered Quintilian a trove of technical information. In fact, the *Institutio Oratoria* was regarded as a more useful manual than either Seneca or Horace.

Quintilian's popularity as a technical guru makes his integration of charismatic elements all the more important as a pretext for the manufacture of cultural genealogies. In the same passage quoted earlier, Quintilian proceeds to cement his point with examples of *poetae-theologi*, as if to prove how charismatic inspiration trumps, but never quite obscures, technical skill. After dismissing the observation (presented as a bit of dialogue) that many orators have been eloquent without the aid of hidden forces, he explains that, in describing an ideal orator, "it is cowardly to despair of anything that is within the bounds of possibility" ["turpiterque desperatur quiquid fieri potest"; 1.10.8]. His examples are of singular interest, comprising not only unimpeachable proof of the presence of supernatural forces but also a grouping of *prisci poetae* tantamount to a brief literary genealogy:

Atque ego vel iudicio veterum poteram esse contentus. Nam quis ignorat musicen (ut de hae primum loquar) tantum iam illis antiquis temporibus non studii modo verum etiam venerationis habuisses ut iidem misici et vates et sapientes iudicarentur (mittam alios) Orpheus et Linus; quorum utrumque dis genitum, alterum vero, quia rudes quoque atque agrestes animos admiratione mulceret, non feras modo sed saxa etiam silvasque duxisse posteritatis memoriae traditum est.

(1.10.9)

For myself I should be ready to accept the verdict of antiquity. Who is ignorant of the fact that music, of which I will speak first, was in ancient times the object not merely of intense study but of veneration: in fact Orpheus and Linus, to mention no others, were regarded as uniting the roles of musician, poet and philosopher. *Both were of divine origin*, while the former, because by the marvel of his music he soothed the savage breast, is recorded to have drawn after him not merely beasts of the wild, but rocks and trees.

(my emphasis)

The argument here is simple. Quintilian uses the term *vates*, a charged and indispensable word for “poet” in the *artes poeticae* of the period, because it implied the divine origins and auspices of poetry. Orpheus and Linus bring music together with divine poetry and philosophy (which is also divine). Therefore – if we follow Quintilian’s logic – these prehistoric poets are good models for the orator inasmuch as music “is the oldest of the arts related to letters” [“omnium in litteris studiorum antiquissimam musicen extitisse”], and oratory comes under the heading of letters. So, if the orator’s models are divine, the orator too can be divine, or divinely inspired, relying on supernatural forces to become an ideal medium for wisdom.

Quintilian’s genealogy (if we can call it that) continues through Iopas, “the Vergilian bard,” and includes the assertion not only that music is “united with knowledge even of things divine” (“musicen cum divinarum eriam rerum cognitione esse coniunctum” [1.10.10–11]), but that therefore music with its supernatural range is necessary for the perfect orator. He includes Pythagoras in the group, and in a strange twist parses the atomic theory as a version of imitation: “The universe is constructed on the same principles which were afterwards *imitated* in the construction of the lyre, [and] . . . attributed a sound to the motions of the celestial bodies” (“mundum ipsum ratione esse compositum, quam postea sit lyra *imitata*, . . . sonum quoque iis motibus dederint” [1.10.12]; my emphasis). To glean a workable theory of imitation from Quintilian’s examples it would be obligatory to interpolate an irrational theory of supernatural intervention. Such a version of *imitatio* would have to include a hereditary background of numinous authority and the delusion of divinely imparted wisdom. Nothing could be farther from modern ideas of technique.

Beyond Seneca

In this section I will concentrate on Seneca’s version of the bees, but it’s valuable to begin with G. W. Pigman’s warning on the subject. He maintains that “the apian metaphor is perhaps the most misleading topos because it is used to present two opposed conceptions of imitation: the poet as collector (following) and the poet as maker (imitation or emulation).”⁷ This distinction between following and imitating, or collecting and making (manufacturing), uncannily reflects the distinction between ordinary, conventional genealogy and cultural genealogy. The former characterizes the sense of accumulation that those “following” a progenitor expect and depend on to prove the charismatic authority of their line. The latter – imitation as making – reflects the conscious agency of those who would construct a cultural genealogy.

As in Quintilian, the bee metaphor *a fortiori* suggests that the practitioner of *imitatio* had transformative powers, as well as the power and freedom to gather from different flowers.⁸ In many cases there’s also a clear allusion to generational indebtedness – not merely an allusion to the *prisci poetae* Orpheus and Linus. Lucretius, for example, opens Book 3 of the *De rerum natura* with an

invocation to Epicurus using the metaphor that became such a benchmark in the early modern period:

tu, pater, es rerum inventor, tu patria nobis
suppeditas praecepta, tuisque ex, inclute, chartis,
floriferis ut apes in slatibus omnia libant,
omnia nos itidem depascimur aurea dicta,
aurea, perpetua semper dignissima vita.⁹

Thou, father, art the discoverer of truths, thou dost supply us with a father's precepts, from thy pages, illustrious man, as bees in the flowery glades sip all the sweets, so we likewise feed on all thy golden words, thy words of gold, ever most worthy of life eternal.

Lucretius suggests a particularly strong generational relationship, a clear father-son genealogy expressed as apian gathering. The nourishment of those "aurea dicta" seems untroubled by intergenerational strife of any kind, and the agency of the gatherers is plainly unimpeded by the bounteous Father Nature figure.

Horace, with what Thomas Greene calls "overstated modesty," uses the apian metaphor to play down his ability to praise Caesar.¹⁰

Ego apis Matinae
more modoque
grata carpentis thyma per laborem
plurimum circa nemus uvidque
Tiburis ripas operosa parvus
carmina fingo.¹¹

I, after the way and manner of the Matinian bee, that gathers the pleasant thyme laboriously around full many a grove and the banks of well-watered Tibur, I, a humble bard, fashion my verses with incessant toil.

Greene reads this passage as disingenuous. He acknowledges that Horace's version of imitation "is said to draw on many models, syncretically, because it is allegedly incapable of the grand Pindaric note." But he goes on to suggest that the ode nonetheless "mediates" Pindar and achieves a "degree of transitivity."¹² I'm not so sure, however, that "transitivity" is Horace's aim, nor do I think it would have been the primary message gleaned from this passage by early modern readers. Despite Greene's conclusion that "the poet, his reader, and his poetic apprentice . . . are obliged to have it both ways"¹³ – and despite the fact that humanist authors often did have it both ways in regard to genealogy and imitation – I think Horace's point is quite firmly anti-genealogical. He seems determined to separate himself from Pindar, if only because he can't equal him, and to call attention to his own laborious (and uninherited) verses ("operose . . . carmina").

Significantly, Seneca's *Epistle 84* underscores this disassociation of *imitatio* from direct indebtedness to past figures. Writing to his friend Lucilius, Seneca begins by making a distinction between reading and writing and then quickly prescribes a balance between them: "We ought not to confine ourselves either to writing or to reading; the one, continuous writing, will cast a gloom over our strength, and exhaust it; the other will make our strength flabby and watery. It is better to have recourse to them alternately, and to blend one with the other, so that the fruits of one's reading may be reduced to concrete form by the pen." ["Nec scribere tantum nec tantum legere debemus; altera res constrisabit vires et exhaustiet, de stilo dico, altera solvet ac diluet. Invicem hoc et illo comendandum est et alterum altero temperandum, ut quicquid lectione collectum est, stilus redigat in corpus."] ¹⁴ Seneca isn't exactly calling for physical exercise when he warns that reading can make one's strength "flabby and watery" ("vires . . . altera solvet ac diluet"). Rather, he is leading up to a precise argument pertaining to how, for aspiring writers especially, the intellectual process should function.

Needless to say, the humanists and their followers more than took Seneca at his word. They regarded *Epistle 84* as a kind of prolegomenon to early modern *paid-eia*, as much an imperative for performative experience as for textual production. The celebrated passage in Seneca lent itself well to wider applications:

Apes, ut aiunt, debemus imitari, quae vaguntur et flores ad mel faciendum idoneos carpunt, deinde quicquid attulere, disponunt ac per favor digerunt et, ut Vergilius noster ait, liquentia mella stipant et dulci distendunt nectare cellas. De illis non satis constat, utrum sucum ex floribus ducant, qui protinus mel sit, an quae collegerunt, in hunc saporem mistura quadam et proprietate spiritus sui mutant. ¹⁵

We should follow, men say, the example of the bees, who flit about and cull the flowers that are suitable for producing honey, and then arrange and assort in their cells all that they have brought in; these bees, as our Vergil says, pack close the flowing honey, and swell their cells with nectar sweet. It is not certain whether the juice which they obtain from the flowers forms at once into honey, or whether they change that which they have gathered into this delicious object by blending something therewith and by a certain property of their breath.

For a few sentences Seneca reflects on theories stemming from different authorities who claim that bees find, rather than produce, honey. But even in reviewing these theories he stays close to his own basic theme of transformation: "Certain [other authorities] maintain that the materials which the bees have culled from the most delicate of blooming and flowering plants is transformed into this peculiar substance by a process of preserving and careful storing away, aided by what might be called fermentation, whereby separate elements are united into one substance." ["Quidam existimant conditura et dispositione in hanc qualitatem verti,

quae ex tenerrimis virentium florentiumque decerpserint, non sine quodam, ut ita dicam, fermento quo in unum diversa coalescunt.”¹⁶ He catches himself digressing and focuses on an expansive application of the metaphor.

Sed ne ad aliud quam de quo agitur abducar, nos quoque has apes debemus imitari et quaecumque ex diversa lectione conguessimus, separare, melius enim distincta servantur, deinde adhibita ingenii nostri cura et facultate in unum saporem varia illa libamenta confundere, ut etiam si apparuerit, unde sumptum sit, aliud tamen esse quam unde sumptum est, appareat.¹⁷

I must not be led astray into another subject than that which we are discussing. We also, I say, ought to copy these bees, and sift whatever we have gathered from a varied course of reading, for such things are better preserved if they are kept separate; then, by applying the supervising care with which our nature has endowed us – in other words, our natural gifts, – we should so blend those several flavours into one delicious compound *that, even though it betrays its origin, yet it nevertheless is clearly a different thing from that whence it came.*

(my emphasis)

There isn't a better analogy for cultural genealogy than the description of the “delicious compound” in the lines I've italicized. Nor are we likely to find a statement more antithetical to ordinary genealogy than this one, with its emphasis on human agency and natural gifts rather than inheritance down the generations, by blood or by more abstruse means. Seneca in fact uses a metaphor to explain his metaphor, likening the sifting and preserving of a course of reading with the digestion of food in the body.

The digestive metaphor too had a long afterlife in the Renaissance, subtly mitigating both the adoption and the Procrustean reshaping of ancient ideas.¹⁸ As it is with eatable food, Seneca says, “so it is with the food which nourishes our higher nature”:

Idem in his, quibus aluntur ingenia, praestemus, ut quaecumque hausimus, non patiamur integra esse, ne aliena sint. Concoquamus illa; alioqui in memoriam ibunt, non in ingenium. Adsentiamur illis fideliter et nostra faciamus, ut unum quiddam fiat ex multis, sicut unus numerus fit ex singulis, cum minores summas et dissidentes computatio una comprehendit. Hoc faciat animus noster: omnia, quibus est adiutus, abscondat, ipsum tantum ostendat, quod effecit. Etiam si cuius in te comparebit similitudo, quem admiration tibi altius fixerit, similem esse te volo quomodo filium, non quomodo imaginem; imago res mortua est.¹⁹

We should see to it that whatever we have absorbed should not be allowed to remain unchanged, or it will be no part of us. We must digest it; otherwise it will merely enter the memory and not the reasoning power (*non in ingenium*). Let us loyally welcome such foods and make them our own, so that

something that is one may be formed out of many elements, just as one number is formed of several elements whenever, by our reckoning, lesser sums, each different from the others, are brought together. This is what our mind should do: it should hide away all the materials by which it has been aided, and bring to light only what it has made of them. Even if there shall appear in you a likeness to him who, by reason of your admiration, has left a deep impress upon you, *I would have you resemble him as a child resembles his father, and not as a picture resembles its original*; for a picture is a lifeless thing.

(my emphasis)

The key to this section of the epistle is the idea that nothing can be absorbed if it isn't changed. Imitation of this kind presupposes full agency in the present, without hindrance from pedigree – as Seneca puts it in a different letter, *Epistle 44*, “If there is any good in philosophy, it is this – that it never looks into pedigrees.” [“Si quid est aliud in philosophia boni, hoc est, quod stemma non inspicit.”]²⁰ Still, a somewhat contradictory remark appears at the end of the passage cited earlier. Seneca obliquely addresses the genealogical question, saying that when admiration and deep impression for a predecessor are present, “I would have you resemble him as a child resembles his father, and not as a picture resembles its original; for a picture is a lifeless thing.”

The problem here – like the conundrum I referred to earlier – is that father-son resemblance can be a very ambiguous concept. Even if we accept that a son's deliberate imitation of his father, resulting in the digestion of paternal nourishment, might explain the reason he resembles him, it's pointless to try to extend this imitative metaphor much further back in generations. That is, it would be difficult for a son to imitate and digest sufficient nourishment from his grandfather, and virtually impossible from his great-grandfather. So the metaphor is limited to the paternal sphere and doesn't fit the genealogical model. In fact, this limitation confirms the conflict between *imitatio* and genealogy.

It may be that Seneca is urging Lucilius to imitate his father as one would imitate a painting, although he never actually says that. He not only doesn't extend the father-son simile, but seems to abandon it:

Puto aliquando ne intellegi quidem posse, si imago vera sit; haec enim omnibus, quae ex quo velut exemplari traxit, formam suam inpressit, ut in unitatem illa competant. No vides, quam multorum vocibus chorus constet? Unus tamen ex omnibus redditur.²¹

I think that sometimes it is impossible for it to be seen who is being imitated, if the copy is a true one; for a true copy stamps its own form upon all the features which it has drawn from what we may call the original, in such a way that they are combined into a unity. Do you not see how many voices there are in a chorus? Yet out of the many only one voice results.

What happened to the father-son resemblance? Seneca's theory has now *reversed* the genealogical process. That is, the "true copy" obliterates its origin and stamps its own features on those of the past figures from which it has drawn. This position Pigman refers to as "dissimulative" imitation, citing Petrarch.²² It suggests an anti-genealogical thematic and, at the same time, provides a blueprint for the kind of remythification so crucial to cultural genealogy.

It might be added, with reference to my earlier discussion, that Seneca's letter offers a more suitable context for the U.S. motto than Virgil's. By contracting "*Unus tamen ex omnibus redditur*" to "*unus ex omnibus*" the Founders might have exploited Seneca's sophisticated idea of imitation as digestion, especially his assertion that "a true copy stamps its own form upon all the features which it has drawn from . . . the original, in such a way that they are combined into a unity." Surely this philosophy better represents the Founders' ideals than the recipe for a garlic spread or salad dressing.

Imago res mortua est

I have spent a long time on Seneca's *Epistle 84* because I think that often it is cited too briefly in scholarly analyses, which tends to disengage the apian material on *imitatio* from the full context of the letter. It might be valuable to remember, for example, that Seneca makes a seamless transition from imitation of written works to Lucilius's conduct in society, urging his young friend to avoid the "emptiness" of seeking office. Evidently, for Horace, there was a logical association between *poetic* conduct and social conduct, an association Daniel Javitch long ago identified as a paradigm of the English Renaissance court.²³ But this association can conceal an important and insuperable fact: *imitatio* represents an absolute cultural Other, a practice too programmatic and apparently restrictive to entice the latter-day imagination. This wouldn't be so important – after all, we find many early modern practices alien and restrictive. But when we neglect the authority of *imitatio*, or deem it unfathomable as a working practice, we risk blurring our perception of cultural legitimacy in the period. Poetry formed the basis of humanist educational reforms and, consequently, *imitatio* became a central tenet of Renaissance thought and production. To ignore the centrality of this practice and its attendant (and warring) theorists would be equivalent to trying to understand the Chinese creative imagination without comprehending the "literary" and artistic value of calligraphy in non-logocentric culture. By suppressing *imitatio* as a living myth, which we do by giving disproportionate valence to other forms of social conduct, we overlook or underestimate a singularly important medium of cultural genealogy.

Let me hasten to add, however, that early modern authors strove to collapse the gap between the practice of imitation and moral or ethically legitimized behavior. They wanted the content of the old medium to seem exactly the same as the new medium. Even if they felt a degradation of the present, they expected their efforts to be recognized as overcoming the degraded state, joining, absorbing, and ultimately subsuming the earlier technology. This was the humanist dream, a utopian identification of present and past in a newly aestheticized technology.

Renaissance treatises on imitation often trip over their own feet, trying at once to avoid both Neoplatonic mysticism and the devastating counter-effect of slavish imitation of Cicero, which undermined the practice of *imitatio* in the eyes of serious practitioners, or more discerning readers of Tully. By the sixteenth century, as is well known, the debates about imitation became much more furious – and, I think, more muddled with questions of genre, language, and subject matter. Remythicizations, like the hunt for poetic origins and the annexation of the *prisci poetae* to modern genealogies, occurred side by side with discussions of imitation, as we see as late as Philip Sidney’s *Defence of Poesie*. Specific examples abound, but, more generally, it is crucial to recognize the impossible conflict at work in these two forms of the preservation of knowledge. The linking of genealogy to *imitatio* was indispensable to the utopian dream. Yet, while genealogy has had a long and prosperous cultural hegemony, poetic imitation never escaped the early modern period.

As Leonardo Bruni’s *De studiis et litteris* indicates, the alien nature of Renaissance *imitatio* could hardly seem more pronounced than in this representative passage – that is, alien to us. Bruni begins his brief handbook on a young woman’s literary education by narrowly limiting the syllabus:

Est enim veluti pabulum animi, quo mens imbuitur atque nutritur. Quam ob rem, ut ii, qui stomachi curam habent, non quemvis cibum illi infundunt, ita, qui sinceritatem animi conservare volet, non quamvis lectionem illi permittet.²⁴

Study is, so to speak, the pabulum of the mind by which the intellect is trained and nourished. For this reason, just as gastronomes are careful in the choice of what they put in their stomachs, so those who wish to preserve purity of taste will only allow certain reading to enter their minds.

The censorship inherent in Bruni’s program is not unfamiliar from debates still raging in our own day. I’m not sure why Craig Kallendorf translates “sinceritatem animi” as “purity of taste.” The Latin term *animus* more usually means “mind,” “soul,” even “heart.” And Bruni’s aim throughout the text seems much more directed toward the purification of a young woman’s soul through higher learning, although it must be said that he gives considerably more space to secular than to sacred literature. In any case, his strong advice is that by reading the proper authors – and *only* the proper authors – the young woman “will train and strengthen her taste, and she will be careful, when she is obliged to say or write something, to use no word she has not first met in one of these authors” [“His se maxime imbuet atque alet curabitque diligenter ut, quotiens ei vel loquendum sit aliquid vel scibendum, nullum ponat verbum quod non in aliquo istorum ante repererit”].²⁵ The command “not to use any word you have not already found in the works of these others” is at first a bit jarring to the modern ear. It seems dictatorial and oppressive, reflecting a kind of proto-Ciceronianism – or, worse, a recipe for a

cento. But in fact Bruni is simply describing a strict form of imitation, the first steps for producing not only a new work, but also a new intellectual culture supposedly based on ancient knowledge. Once again I have a slight objection, this time to the word “taste” in Kallendorf’s translation of the phrase “His se maxime imbuet atque alet” as “With them she will train and strengthen her taste.” The word “taste” isn’t necessarily suggested by “alet,” from the Latin *alere*, which means “nourish” or “support.” “Taste” might be part of the plan of intellectual nourishment, but again I think Bruni’s aim is a little higher. A better way to think of the phrase might be: “With them she will train and nourish herself in the best way (*maxime*).”²⁶

The difference between purity of mind or soul and purity of taste all but parallels the difference between a genealogical approach to literary inheritance and an approach grounded in *imitatio*. For *imitatio* was fundamentally an exercise in taste – taste as censorious discrimination, taste as selection *de primii inter pares*, and taste as connoisseurship. Above all, however – whether used to transform or to “dissimulate” – *imitatio* was proof positive of authorial agency. And such proof was needed, which is another indication of how distant from ours was the early modern poetic imagination. It comes as no surprise to us to discover that the descent of poetic culture, and indeed culture in general as we understand it, is not a natural occurrence, but, rather, the result of a deliberate remythicization of ancient sources. Yet humanist authors insisted on having it both ways: they saw themselves as simultaneously imitators of selected ancient writers and also charismatically endowed descendants of those authors. This simple contradiction reflects a conflict at the epistemological heart of Western culture.

Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, discussing anachronism, argue that “the apprehension of historical artifacts in the late medieval and early modern period, as well as the production of new images and buildings, was built on the following paradox: the possibility that a material sample of the past could somehow be *both* an especially powerful testimony to a distant world *and* at the same time an ersatz for another, now absent artifact.”²⁷ *Imitatio* was the exculpation of the ersatz artifact, the technology that embodied the absent Other. Nagel and Wood go on to say, “The interpretation of artifacts rests on two logically incompatible convictions, neither of which could be easily abandoned: on the one hand, that material evidence was the best sort of evidence; on the other hand, that it was very likely that at some point material artifacts had been replaced. Instead of allowing one conviction to prevail, people thought ‘doubly’ about artifacts.”²⁸ The same might be said, *mutatis mutandis*, about how humanist authors thought “doubly” about the relationship of their imitations to their models – and also, ineluctably, about the relationship of imitation to transcultural descent. In a sense, Nagel and Wood are just reminding us that all values are local, that, despite the oppressive shadow of the past and even in a vacuum of historical evidence, contemporary interpretation recreates the past as an art form. They conclude that, in contrast to buildings, relics, and artworks, “the force of an old poem did not depend on the literal antiquity of the page it was written on.”²⁹ Perhaps not, although archival researchers might disagree. It’s most important

to recognize, however, that a poem's force is hardly a stable entity: *imago res mortua est*. And for early modern readers its status as canonical (as opposed to merely old) depended on a set of convictions as paradoxical as those held by people rationalizing ersatz artifacts.

These convictions stem from the paradoxical nature of the difference between Renaissance *imitatio* and the new techniques of genealogy steadily developing during the early modern period. This is in fact the conundrum, the conflict, that I spoke of at the start of this chapter. Practitioners of *imitatio* eschewed the notion of progress in their techniques and hewed as closely as possible to ancient methods, or at least claimed to do so. Thus we can say *imitatio* was devolutionary in technique, but evolutionary in its ambitious attempts to reprocess the knowledge base. Humanists, from Albertino Mussato even unto Vico's eighteenth-century concept of "poetic knowledge," never lost sight of their goal of epistemological reinvention. In contrast, genealogy was evolutionary in its adoption of – and authorization by – spanking new, scientifically progressive techniques, but it was systematically devolutionary in reducing its meaning to the charismatic blood myth.

Notes

- 1 I have found most helpful, inter alia, two articles by G. W. Pigman III: "Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance," *Renaissance Quarterly* 33 (1980): 1–32, especially Pigman's comprehensive footnote on p. 1; also, his "Imitation and the Renaissance Sense of the Past: The Reception of Erasmus' *Ciceronianus*," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 9 (1979): 155–77; Martin L. McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation in the Italian Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Greene, *The Light in Troy*; Craig Kallendorf, "From Virgil to Vida: The *Poeta Theologus* in Italian Renaissance Commentary," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56 (1995): 41–62; Danilo Aguzzi-Barbagli, "Humanism and Poetics," in *Renaissance Humanism*, 3 vols., ed. Albert Rabil Jr. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988) 3: 85–169; Remigio Sabbadini, *Storia del Ciceronianismo e di altre questioni letterarie nell'Età del Rinascimento* (Torino: E. Loescher, 1885); *Ciceronian Controversies*, ed. Joann Dellaneva; trans., Brian Duvick (Cambridge, MA: I Tatti Renaissance Library, Harvard University Press, 2007); Bernard Weinberg, *Trattati di poetica e retorica del Cinquecento* (Bari: Laterza, 1970).
- 2 See McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation in the Italian Renaissance*, 249.
- 3 *Ciceronian Controversies*, viii.
- 4 *Ibid.*, xv.
- 5 See, for instance, Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 10.1.19, trans. H. E. Butler, 4 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1922; 1958). All further references are in the text.
- 6 I have occasionally changed the exact wording of Butler's translation, as in this phrase and below at 1.10.10 where Butler translates "litteris" as "literature." Given the contested aspects of that latter word, I've used "letters" as a broad category including oratory.
- 7 Pigman, "Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance," 4.
- 8 See *ibid.*, 5: "Macrobius appears to be the first author to assume that the crucial point of Seneca's apian metaphor is not the bees' ability to transform pollen into honey, but their collecting pollen from different flowers." I discuss Seneca in detail later, but let me emphasize here the shifting valence between transforming and gathering in terms of the value of imitation in constructing genealogies.

- 9 Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, trans. W.H.D. Rouse (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1947) 170–71.
- 10 Greene, *The Light in Troy*, 68.
- 11 Horace, *Carmina* 4.2.27–32. In *Odes and Epodes*, trans. C. E. Bennett (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914; 1988) 288–89.
- 12 Greene, *The Light in Troy*, 68.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Seneca, *Moral Epistles*, 10 vols., trans. Richard M. Gummere (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917–25) 5: 277–83; 277.
- 15 Ibid., 278–80.
- 16 Ibid., 278–79.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 There was, almost predictably, a strain of counter-digestive metaphors among imitation theorists. See, for instance, Paolo Cortesi’s letter to Angelo Poliziano, *Ciceronian Controversies*: “It is unavoidable that various types of foods digest together badly and that, as a result of the impure mixture of dissimilar types of speech, their words clash with one another.” [“Fieri enim non potest quin varia ciborum genera male concoquantur, et quin ex tanta colluvione dissimillimi generis inter se verba collidantur.”] (12–13)
- 19 Seneca, *Moral Epistles*, 5: 280–81.
- 20 Ibid., 4: 286–87.
- 21 Ibid., 5: 280–81.
- 22 The obliteration or concealing of the model Pigman refers to as “dissimulative imitation.” He cites, among many other texts, *Epistle 84*, 1.7, and Petrarch’s famous letter to Boccaccio in which Petrarch casts himself as father to his secretary, Giovanni Malpaghini. See Pigman, “Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance,” 9–10.
- 23 Daniel Javitch, *Poetry and Courtliness in Renaissance England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978).
- 24 Leonardo Bruni, *De Studiis et Litteris*, in *Humanist Educational Treatises*, trans. Craig Kallendorf (Cambridge, MA: I Tatti Renaissance Library, Harvard University Press, 2002) 96–97. Although I raise a minor question about one word, I am indebted throughout this section to Kallendorf’s fine translation.
- 25 Ibid., 98–99.
- 26 “Imbuet” can mean “he/she will instruct” or even “initiate,” both of which Kallendorf conflates admirably in his translation, “she will train.” But the sense of initiation is worth keeping in mind.
- 27 Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone 2010) 31. Emphasis in original.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid.

7 Not so deep as genealogy

The *Ciceronianus* fallacy

If the meaning of the new genealogical techniques can only be the old blood myth, then the meaning of the newly adopted techniques of imitation, revised for Christian poets, can only be ancient poetry and oratory. This is precisely where the survival of the pagan gods is meant to take place amid the crumbling ethnogenic fables. But in actuality the pagan gods can't survive the practice of *imitatio* because that practice is turned into an art form when adopted as a new technology by Renaissance authors. The transformation of an ancient practice into a "modern" art form imbues the new technology with contemporary values. Notwithstanding the free play of modern tropes, these contemporary values, presented with the trappings of a proudly *retrospective* technique, empty out and remythify the icons of the past, expunging them from culture in the very act of admiring and assimilating the ancient technique.

In an article on the imitation of Cicero, Ángel García Galiano claims that, "as is well known, every formal innovation eventually leads, necessarily, to innovation in contents and worldviews."¹ This is a good point, but does *imitatio* mean innovation? Humanist writing offers a divided answer to that question. On one hand, the answer is a resounding no, since humanists are reluctant to innovate in formal practice even when they complain about the slavish imitation of Cicero or fling the ape metaphor about.² A fine line separates outright copying of formal techniques of antiquity from their alteration in modern poetic production. On the other hand, "innovation in contents and worldviews" certainly characterized the humanists' approach to the recent past. Their adoption of new genres and styles – at least by their lights – represents not only innovation, but a renovation of crucial areas of medieval culture, such as linguistic aptitude, pedagogy, poetry, rhetoric, philosophy, and even theology, as in Ficino's *Platonic Theology*. New techniques taken fully formed from Roman sources and aestheticized helped make possible the "darkening" of the Middle Ages.

It should be clear, therefore, why *imitatio* became the hallmark of humanist education: by claiming to imitate the ancients in their own venerable technique, early modern authors rewrote the immediate past to the specifications of present-day mores without acknowledging – or perhaps even recognizing – the revaluations. As David Quint suggests, "To assert the value of individual divergence from

a canonic tradition, particularly from the imposing models of classical antiquity, became possible only when that tradition was historicized and ceased to function – on account of its priority – as an absolute standard. *The tradition's historicity is recognized in its imitability*" (my emphasis).³ Although I've never read an early modern writer who said expressly that imitation is possible because a tradition has been historicized, ample proof exists nonetheless of emptied-out models from the past. Literary-cultural revaluations, what Quint refers to as "imitability," were manifested not only in historicizing ancient tradition for the sake of neutralizing it in the past. Yet historicizing ancient tradition was less important than aesthetizing it, turning it into an art form and fashioning something to be interpreted. This created an environment of revaluations in which a revived technology such as *imitatio* flourished. But, even given this license, the revaluation and emptying out of ancient tradition was conducted with a kind of faux discretion. Protestations abound in treatises of the period to the effect that Orpheus or Homer or Cicero not only would have been good Christians if they had only lived at the right time, but that they were in fact poet-theologians inspired by the Word *avant le fait*. For example, as Kallendorf notes in discussing Coluccio Salutati's views on the subject, "Interpretation ought to uncover what the poet-theologian had really meant; but if adapting pagan poetry to Christian truth produces something which violates authorial intention, such a violation is nevertheless an acceptable opinion, indeed a far more appropriate meaning than the one the author thought he had invented."⁴ It would be difficult to find a better – and less justifiable – theory of localizing values and, inevitably, expunging the mores, meaning, and culture of the past. No pagan gods could survive such a violently refitted interpretation.

Erasmus is somewhat less extreme in the *Ciceronianus*, but he makes a similar argument in the course of defending the separation of form from content (and, by logical extension, from function). He ventures to remove ancient rhetorical technique from its argumentative content, like a neutral architecture, and use it to house true Christian character:

But I won't have it that a man is speaking in Ciceronian manner, if, being a Christian, he speaks to Christians on a Christian subject in the way that Cicero, being a pagan, once spoke to pagans on non-Christian subjects; but only if he speaks as Cicero would be likely to speak if he were living today as a Christian among Christians, endowed with his original native ability and his oratorical experience, possessed of the same understanding of our concerns that he once had of pagan ones, inspired, finally, with love and loyalty for the Christian world as he was once fired with pride and passion for the city of Rome and the honour of the Roman name. Let anyone who can proffer all this step forward, and we shall without argument allow him to be named a Ciceronian, if it really matters to him so much to have this title.⁵

There seems to be a distinction without a difference in the first sentence, unless Erasmus is dismissing all forms of Ciceronianism (which he never quite does). His chief point is that Cicero "living today as a Christian among Christians" would

deploy the same *ars eloquendi* he perfected in antiquity to express his passion for the Christian message. Erasmus challenges his contemporaries to do exactly this if they wish to be called Ciceronians – a title he doesn't seem to hold in high esteem. Elsewhere in the text he explains, somewhat cryptically:

So the first concern of the Ciceronians should have been to understand the mysteries of the Christian religion, and to turn the pages of the sacred books with as much enthusiasm as Cicero devoted to the writings of philosophers, poets, experts in law and religion, and historians. With all this did the great Cicero equip himself. So how shall we ever be Ciceronians when we never touch – when we positively despise and recoil from – the laws, prophets, histories, and commentators that belong to what we profess?⁶

This is, at least in part, an attack on the secularization of letters. But Erasmus's logic should above all be a cautionary reminder of how alien early modern (and especially Erasmian) thought is to postmodernist beliefs in the idea that form can only be an extension of function. It is a questionable logic: Cicero was Cicero because of the Roman books he read and, therefore, in "modern times" one can only be Ciceronian if one reads "the laws, prophets, histories, and commentators that belong to what we profess." Evidently "being Ciceronians" means adopting Cicero's rhetorical techniques to the Christian thematic.

But, as I've indicated throughout this book, this kind of adoption can't occur without a forced Procrustean-bed alteration of the new technology. Pigman quotes Erasmus's letter to John Maldonatus, which, if I understand it correctly, underscores the impossibility of wrenching the techniques of Ciceronian oratory wholesale from their roots: "I think that if Cicero were living and speaking about our religion, he would not say, 'May almighty God do this,' but 'May best and greatest Jupiter do this'; nor would he say, 'May the grace of Jesus Christ assist you,' but 'May the son of best and greatest Jupiter make what you do succeed'; nor would he say, 'Peter, help the Roman Church' but 'Romulus, make the Roman senate and people prosper.'" ⁷ According to Pigman, the second sentence is "strongly ironic" in support of his "constant position that Cicero would treat Christian matters in Christian terms because a master of eloquence always suits his expressions to the uses of the times in which he finds himself." ⁸ Perhaps without intending it, Erasmus has highlighted the awkward possibility that an ancient technique is in fact a vessel to be filled, rather than an already complete art form. Greene maintains that imitation sustains, or reveals, "the interplay between stabilizing etiologies and a destabilizing perception of disjuncture." ⁹ But Erasmus seems to be laughing at the idea of interplay.

Throughout the *Ciceronianus* he proposes instead a more concrete theory of imitation based on a radical division of form from function – a division much more profound than, say, the use of the sonnet form as a political poem (*viz.* Milton's "The Recent Massacre at Piedmont"). For instance:

It may well be that the most Ciceronian person is the one least like Cicero, the person, that is, who expresses himself in the best and most appropriate way,

even though he does so in a manner very different from Cicero's – which would hardly be surprising, considering that everything has been completely altered.¹⁰

This makes no sense – or, more accurately, only makes sense to us because we're inured to the ubiquitous Renaissance paradox at the core of this statement. Everything has indeed been altered, but the alteration is not primarily in the content (though that too may be different in this case). The alteration is in the status of the technique itself.

But is this a genealogical or an imitative proposition? Where is the digestive element if Erasmus is proposing a mechanical practice, the typical Senecan *ars*? It seems, rather, that he is dreaming of a semi-magical, charismatic process of transformation, something akin to the mysterious state-of-being we find in Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait as the Apostle Paul* (see Figure 3.4) or Lorenzo Valla's contention in the *De falso et ementita Constantini donatione* that he was in fact Paul.¹¹ Greene has asserted that “[Imitation] seeks no suprahistorical order; it accepts the temporal, the contingent, and the specific as given. But it makes possible an emergent sense of identity, personal and cultural, by demonstrating the viability of diachronic itineraries.”¹² It seems to me, *pace* Greene, that Erasmus, like most humanists, wants it both ways. He insists on the emergence of personal and cultural identity through the right “diachronic itinerary” – the Christian imitation of Cicero. But he also seems to promise a “suprahistorical” transference of the Ciceronian spirit or *manes* to the modern user of Ciceronian techniques. If not a strictly genealogical approach, Erasmus's translation of Ciceronian spirit into a Christian “decorum” traces the process of transcultural descent.¹³

Despite what Pigman calls the ironical nature of the letter to Maldonatus, the Erasmus of the *Ciceronianus* offers what he seems to consider a clear formula for combining Ciceronian *technē* with Christian content:

Where sacred things are concerned, one must right at the start absorb the convictions that are truly worthy of a Christian. If that happens, we shall find nothing that offers more scope than the heavenly philosophy, nothing more delightful than the name of Jesus Christ, nothing more pleasing than the words used by the luminaries of the church to deal with matters of the faith. Nor will pleasure be taken in any speech that does not fit the speaker's personality and accord with his subject; and a person who treats matters of the faith in the phrases of unbelievers and contaminates his Christian subject-matter with pagan follies will be thought a positive monstrosity.¹⁴

Is this a contradiction in terms? Can an ancient formal technique ever be suited or fitted or correspond to (“congruit”) a post-antique, Christian character? Erasmus is claiming that the skills of Ciceronian rhetoric can remain intact when re-measured for the Christian character – a Procrustean-bed technological alteration, as I said earlier. The old vessel, according to Erasmus, can remain unperturbed on the outside while its contents are Christianized (and modernized) for the new

epoch. He might not believe in slavishly imitating Cicero alone, and he might warn Christians to beware the practice of decorum because it leads to an imitation of paganism. But Erasmus – like his contemporaries – defines imitation in terms of techniques handed down from antiquity and propagates the false conceit that those techniques can remain intact while their content is refitted.

The reason Erasmus's conceit is a fallacy is that the rhetorical and imitative techniques of antiquity are, as already noted, themselves aestheticized in the Renaissance. In the second chapter I quoted Marshall McLuhan's statement that "each new technology creates an environment that is itself regarded as corrupt and degrading. Yet the new one turns its predecessor into an art form." Erasmus's complaint about the slavish imitation of Ciceronian techniques is tantamount to a complaint and an admonition about the new environment created by what he deems technical abuse. He forcibly divides the medium from the message – or appears to do so, as if it were in fact possible to hypostatize them, splitting Cicero's techniques from the "corrupt and degrading" environment created by the abuse of those techniques. This would be a sensible objection if *imitatio* were in fact a developing sixteenth-century technical practice, like, say, philology or – ironically – genealogy. But *imitatio* is an ancient practice, which, despite his attempts to modernize content, Erasmus proposes to leave methodologically intact. He awards the techniques and the environment they created in antiquity the status of a work of art. A possible analogy would be trying to play ancient music using techniques designed for lost instruments.

Gianfrancesco Pico seems to be making a similar point when he compares speakers of Greek and Latin in his own day with ancient speakers of those languages.

Whether they wanted to or not, people naturally used to speak Greek in Greece and Latin in Italy. We Italians who speak Latin, let alone Greek, have acquired and developed that skill by our own industry. So if our age were allotted a fair judge in such matters, he would be right to prefer to those great men and champions of yore the mediocre speakers of today, namely those who, though surrounded by Goths, Vandals and Huns, keep to that ancient pattern of speech, wiped out so many centuries ago – or who try to keep to it through continual imitation, showing in this matter remarkable and perhaps excessive subtlety.¹⁵

With full marks for his use of the humility topos, Pico explains that he favors the "mediocre speakers of today" ("qui nunc mediocriter loquuntur") over the champions of the past, for the simple reason that it's more praiseworthy to learn a language through industry than to be born speaking it. Hidden beneath this argument is the ubiquitous Renaissance tension between merit and birth. But, that apart, Pico is more concerned to demonstrate how imitation inevitably looks at such a distance of time.

Certain men wish neither to be nor to seem like the ancients either in the way they run or the way they walk alone, but to advance by stepping in their

predecessors' tracks. If the ancient steps are bigger, even as their bodies were, will the smaller foot step surely in those tracks or will it slip if the ground there is soaked? But if the ancients' steps turn out to be smaller than ours, will careful feet be kept out of them and be frustrated of their wish? For who will find a footprint of the same size that fits him exactly? That is, unless some shop is unearthed from the ruins of Rome to provide us with some shoemaker's lasts. But the ancients had as many shoes as feet.¹⁶

The metaphor of the "tracks" is common enough, used by Poliziano as well as Lucretius and Horace.¹⁷ But the "shoemaker's lasts" ("*formulas*") are a rare addition, and they lead Pico to a forceful and convincing conclusion on the relationship of imitation to antiquity. "Don't think, Bembo," he writes, "even if you discover ancient sandals among some hidden treasures and get them to fit, that you can ever get the critics to reckon them ancient. . . . They will not be considered anything but new, that is, incomplete and imperfect in every category."¹⁸

Pico, adamant that imitation can never re-appropriate the "sandals" of the past, misses the chief point – misses, indeed, the *Ciceronianus* fallacy. If we were to extend Pico's already extended metaphor, we could explain it this way: *imitatio* is itself the sandal. It is not a matter of passing off the *product* of imitation as old, but of believing the technique itself is anything but an unearthed aesthetic object, "incomplete and imperfect in every category" and ripe for remythification according to contemporary cultural norms. Hidden behind Pico's error is the truth of the humanists' practice of imitation. They remythified the ancient technique, transforming a process into an aesthetic object, assigning cultural values to its interpretation, and importing the charismatic aura of the art object. In this way, through the inheritance of art forms so conceived, vertical history continues in the guise of the transcultural descent of ancient *technē*.

The play's the thing

According to Greene, "[I]mitation acts out a passage of history that is a retrospective version or construct, with all the vulnerability of a construct. It has no ground other than the 'modern' universe of meanings it is helping to actualize and the past universe it points to allusively and simplifies."¹⁹ This metaphor of a "vulnerable" construct has had enormous influence since Greene's book, yet no one, to my knowledge, has paid any attention to the theatrical metaphor with which this famous passage begins: "Imitation *acts out* a passage of history." This is an unfortunate oversight, even if it's predictable in light of the bias toward linguistic porousness inherited from poststructuralist theory. But the dramatic metaphor, regardless of how effaced or "unintentional" it might be in the sentence, has powerful resonances in treatises on imitation and poetics in the early modern period. Many of these treatises are cast as dialogues, consummately fictional constructs in which the interlocutors "act out" particular received opinions. Even more interesting is Erasmus's version of the subgenre, which, in addition to being a dialogue, opens with a bit of deliberately fashioned fiction-within-the-fiction.

Bulephorus – Erasmus’s normative mouthpiece in the dialogue – proposes that he and Hypologus play different parts in order to cure Nosophorus of “a new sort of illness.” This second fiction is theatrical, and the characters’ “acting out” of it amounts to purposeful deceit of their friend (for his own good, of course).

Hyp. Hasn’t it got a name then?

Bu. Not a Latin one; the Greeks call it *zelodulea*, “style-addiction.”

Hyp. Did he catch it recently, or has he had it a long time?

Bu. It’s had the poor fellow in its grip for more than seven years. I say, we’ve been spotted. It looks as if he’s coming this way. You’ll get a better idea what’s wrong from the man himself. I shall play Davus to begin with – you see that you follow my lead in the conversation and act your part in the charade.

Hyp. Yes, I’ll join in wholeheartedly – if I know what you’re giving me to do.

Bu. What I really want is to deliver our poor old friend from his great affliction.

Hyp. Do you understand medicine as well, then?

Bu. There’s a form of madness, you know, which doesn’t take away the wits entirely; it damages just one part of the mind, but with remarkable effect – I mean cases like the ones where people are convinced they have bull’s horns growing on their heads, or that they are afflicted with an enormously long nose, or have a huge pottery head balanced on a spindly neck, which must smash as soon as they make the slightest movement. Some of them believe they are dead, and are terrified of any contact with the living.

Hyp. Say no more, I know that sort of illness.

Bu. The most effective way of healing people like that is to pretend you suffer from the same disease yourself.

Hyp. So I’ve often heard.

Bu. That’s what we’re going to do.

Hyp. Then I’ll be delighted to take a supporting role and not just watch the play, as I really do wish the man well.

Bu. Very well then, look serious and start acting your part. He mustn’t get any inkling that we’re in collusion.

Hyp. All set.²⁰

Writing 400 years after Erasmus, Greene can’t avoid the theatrical metaphor when he claims that imitation “*acts out* a passage of history,” reminding us (perhaps inadvertently) that the imitative process is always already an aesthetic object. As such, like the calcified remains of the *Laocoön* rising from its ancient site, *imitatio* already contains the values imbued by present-day cultural conditions of criticism, connoisseurship, social mores, and so forth. Revaluation can’t be avoided, and the theatrical pose of Erasmus’s dialogue characters demonstrates its status as already arrived. Literary phenomena like this one help to explain how cultural genealogy embeds itself in a discourse.

As Leonard Barkan astutely observes when describing Michelangelo, “who makes sense out of the muscular torsion and the struggle against external bonds”

of the *Laocoön*, “The great sculptural forms that he creates . . . are not imitations but responses to a set of qualities in the *Laocoön* that he himself has defined. In turn his status canonizes the vision while rendering it almost inimitable.”²¹ We can say the same about Erasmus’s status and the canonization of Ciceronian technique. To have already defined a set of sculptural qualities by contemporary standards is to imbue the technology of the present with the content of the past in the form of a work of art – the ancient process doesn’t develop because it no longer exists. In order to imagine the process in the present it is necessary to retool it. Barkan speaks of the narrative that accompanies the unearthed *Laocoön* – “even the thousand years of neglect that have mutilated the statue become part of its narrative.”²² The presence of narrative in the re-appropriation of the past applies to imitation as well as to archeological unearthings. When Erasmus appears to wrest the constructs of Ciceronian rhetoric from their ancient sites, he in fact creates a new narrative, a newly aestheticized version of the content of the old technology.

It is imperative to recognize that a constitutive, generic difference exists between the early modern “environment” of imitation and the ancient environment, that when ancient practice itself becomes the art form, the revaluation of the past has already occurred as a prerequisite to technical function or practice. *Imitatio*, supposedly an old technology reacquired as a retrospective improvement in form alone, in actuality came complete with a content for the very reason that the humanists calcified and adopted it. The practice of imitation in the Renaissance is, like Michelangelo’s relationship to the *Laocoön*, a response that defines ancient *imitatio* for contemporary intellection, an act equivalent to producing a sculpture. In fact, ironically, there’s one tradition that claims Michelangelo turned down the commission to add a missing arm to the *Laocoön*. According to Barkan, “It is appropriate to surmise that Michelangelo did not wish to touch so directly upon the marble of the ancient work itself, just as it has been said that he was opposed to restoring the *Torso Belvedere* for similar reasons.”²³ An arm was supplied in 1532 but a new arm was needed around 1540. Barkan acknowledges that “Many believe that this newest limb . . . was actually executed by Michelangelo” and that “Perhaps [Michelangelo] changed his mind during those ten years and decided to put aside his reverence and impose himself on the *Laocoön*.”²⁴ Michelangelo’s resistance to creating a model of imitation from his own imitation of the most famous ancient sculpture reflects almost too perfectly the clash between the early modern practice of *imitatio* and the ancient environment, between a new medium and the content of a previous environment.

Imitatio already signified something, already had a content. But it was not the “persuasive name of Jesus Christ” (“*suavius Iesu Christi nomine*,” Erasmus) or the many Cyruses of Xenophon (Philip Sidney) or the flowers of rhetoric that provided the content of this new technique. On the contrary, the content of Renaissance *imitatio*, along with such fundamental humanist concepts as *latinitas* and *romanitas*, is best described in terms of what Borkenau says regarding the “style” of a culture, and the tendency of exclusions to be embedded in new styles. *Imitatio* was a defining style, an art form that openly excluded medieval poetic and rhetorical Latin and vernacular culture. But its practice should never be confused

with Roman *imitatio*. Whereas Horace, for example, might have used imitative techniques to produce his poems, the result of Renaissance authors' use of imitation was imitative style itself.

Erasmus insists, "Anyone who can be Ciceronian only by being unchristian is not even Ciceronian. . . . This is the purpose of studying the basic disciplines, of studying philosophy, of studying eloquence, to know Christ, to celebrate the glory of Christ. This is the goal of all learning and eloquence. The liberal arts, philosophy, and oratory are learned to the end that we may know Christ, that we may celebrate the glory of Christ"; and he adds, with finality, "This is the whole scope of learning and eloquence." These are understandable exhortations for Erasmus's religiously fanatical audience, but even here he complicates technique (if that's what he's talking about) with character analysis. Like his statement quoted earlier that, perhaps, "the most Ciceronian person is the one least like Cicero," in this passage Erasmus argues that being "unchristian" bars the speaker from being Ciceronian. He then complicates the issue further with a methodological metaphor, offering a characteristically problematic prescription for imitation: "We must imitate the most distinctive thing that Cicero offers us, and that lies not in mere words nor in the outer layer of verbal expression but in substance and sentiments, in intellectual ability, in right judgment. *What is the good of a son being like his father in physical feature if he is unlike him in mind and character?*"²⁵ The last question, which I've emphasized, calls our attention to the curiously ambivalent relationship between imitation and genealogy, not only in Erasmus, but in humanism generally. Despite the father-son metaphor, Erasmus is actually proposing a kind of authorial agency in relation to descent from past models. His question, more accurately phrased, would be something like, "Why should the 'son' *choose* to reproduce the parent 'in lines of face' when he is unlike him in mind and character?" The element of choice is implicit both in this question and in Erasmus's general attitude toward imitation. But Erasmus isn't satisfied with choice alone. Elsewhere in the dialogue he describes imitation with a significant difference. Referring again to parentage, in this passage he introduces a supernatural process:

I approve imitation – but imitation of a model that is in accord with, or at least not contrary to, your own native genius, so that you do not embark on a hopeless enterprise, like the giants fighting against the gods. Again, I approve of imitation – but not enslaved to one set of rules, from the guidelines of which it dare not depart, but imitation which gathers from all authors, or at least from the most outstanding, the thing which is the chief virtue of each and which suits your own cast of mind; imitation which does not immediately incorporate into its own speech any nice little feature it comes across, but transmits it to the mind for inward digestion, so that becoming part of your own system, it gives the impression not of something begged from someone else, but of something that springs from your own mental processes, something that exudes the characteristics and force of your own mind and personality. Your reader will see it not as a piece of decoration filched from Cicero, but a child sprung from your own brain, the living image of its father,

like Pallas from the brain of Jove. Your speech will not be a patchwork or a mosaic, but a lifelike portrait of the person you really are, a river welling out from your inmost being.²⁶

The many metaphors here – “giants fighting gods,” “enslaved” to rules, gathering from all authors – produce not so much a contradiction in terms as a curious association between imitative agency and genealogy by fiat. Erasmus’s analogy implies that culling and digesting the best parts of other authors to make beautiful things one’s own is parallel to the legendary springing forth full blown of Minerva from Jupiter’s brain. Without belaboring the point, the link between filiation – Minerva has no agency in her birth – and the process of choosing, discarding, and producing poetry or eloquent speech unavoidably reflects the conflict between genealogy and imitation. As so often in discussions of imitation, the ideal of authorial agency overlaps with a dream of transcultural descent. Cultural genealogy falls somewhere between the wide range of genealogy and the depth of authorial imitation – to adapt poor Mercutio, it’s not so wide as genealogy, nor so deep as imitation.

All cultural genealogies require the suppression of the contradiction between imitation and genealogy. They therefore embody – or enact, like Erasmus’s play-within-the-dialogue – the lie of descent in which this fundamental contradiction is embedded.

Furor poeticus

For Renaissance imitation, the spanner in the works is, predictably, *furor poeticus* and its cousins *furor divinus* and *furor theologus*. *Furor poeticus* not only contradicts the idea of *imitatio*, but, in its most extreme interpretations, fully defeats the practice by denying the value of technique in poetic production. Deliberate choosing among the best authors, the process of digestion, and conscious production – all are whisked from the poet’s command by the force of an inspiration that drives him (or her) into a frenzy of creation. Nothing could be farther from the Erasmian myth of rational Christianizing or the adoptive Senecan practice recommended to poets and rhetoricians alike by many theorists. Grafting, as I suggested, might be seen as a plausible bridge between genealogy and imitation because it physically changes a family strain or species while retaining elements of agency and deliberate choice. But the more common bridge between genealogy and imitation in the early modern era isn’t a bridge at all. The idea of effortless poetic production through unconscious inheritance or divine inspiration, though less plausible to modern sensibilities, was an inextricable component of early modern intellectual culture. Deborah Shuger once remarked that the Renaissance was “saturated” by religion. This is a good metaphor to apply as well to the notion of *furor* in the humanists’ cultural worldview. As Kallendorf has reminded us, “The theory of the poet as theologian became the cornerstone of humanist poetics.”²⁷ Handed down, perhaps, from such authorities on technique as Quintilian, the intrusion of divine inspiration *saturated* the myth of transcultural descent.

As I've noted elsewhere, in the influential Neoplatonic theory of Marsilio Ficino, the poet is not a maker so much as a passive channel through which the divine voice flows.²⁸ The *furor poeticus*, in this view, obliterates imitation. Ficino writes in a 1474 letter to Antonio Pelotti that "Poetry springs not from technique but from a kind of frenzy" ["Poësim non ab arte, sed a furore aliquo proficisci"]. Clearly the frenzy, or "furor," described here has more in common with the passive conditions of genealogical inheritance – and its charismatic qualities – than with any sort of deliberate act of making. "Those in a frenzy sing many things," says Ficino, "indeed, even wonderful things – which a little after their frenzy ceases to rage they do not quite understand, almost as if they themselves had not been speaking but God had been sounding through them, as through trumpets" ["quod multa furentes canunt, et illa quidem mirabilia, quae paulo post deferuescente furore ipsimet non satis intelligunt, quasi non ipsi pronunciauerint, se Deus per eos ceu tubas clamauerit"].²⁹ On the absence of art in poetry Ficino is probably echoing Plato, *Phaedrus* (245a) and *Ion* (534cd), but in the realm of imitation such an absence constitutes an intellectual and pedagogical conflict.

This conflict amounts to an incommensurateness of poetic virtues, and, as such, makes the *artes poeticae* of the period difficult to understand. Modern critical approaches tend to separate *imitatio* and *furor poeticus* into discrete categories, whereas in fact those categories were extremely porous. We do a disservice to humanist authors if we attempt to exfiltrate imitation from poetic frenzy – a disservice along the lines of William Blake's misreading of Satan in *Paradise Lost*. In other words, we "un-saturate" at our own risk. Many poetic treatises began by establishing poetry's divine and prehistoric origins because proving that poet-theologians had been the creators of civilization affirmed the value of poetry in the modern world. Pythagorus, Hesiod, and Homer to Ennius, Virgil, and even Cicero appear as inspired antecedents in a genealogical line that includes the poet David and the Evangelists. Because these early poets-cum-philosophers were vatic figures, their voices directly inspired by the gods (or God, in the retroactive myth), Renaissance descents from them not only crossed cultural gaps, but inevitably produced vatic genealogies. In consequence, the business of imitation bifurcated along lines unfamiliar to us today.

Cristoforo Landino provides a useful instance. A more or less convinced Neoplatonist, Landino declared it a manifest fact in his *Proemio al commento Dantesco* "that the origin of poetry is more excellent than the origin of the human arts . . . because the divine fury in which poetry originates is of greater excellence than the human excellence in which the arts originate." ["che l'origine della poetica sia piu eccellente che l'origine dell'arti umane sia manifesta, perch, el divino furore onde ha origine la poesia sia piu eccellente che la eccellenza umana onde hanno origine l'arti."]³⁰ Landino is referring to the products of *technē* such as rhetoric, painting, and music. Poetry is exempt from this group because of its unique origin. Further, poetry is distinguished from other forms of writing in its intent: "The poets alone," he declares, "in contrast to the customs of other writers, invoke divine help, because they intend the poem to be divine and not human, proceeding from the divine fury" ["Possiamo ancora arrogare che e' poeti

soli contro alla consuetudine degl'altri scrittori invocono l'aiuto divino, perch, intendono el poema essere divino e non umano, e da divino furore precedente”].³¹ These sentiments are traditional Neoplatonism applied to poetry. From them follow the deduction, voiced by Landino, that “God is the supreme poet, and the world his poem.”

Landino repeatedly lists the *prisci poetae*, or “first poets,” as his personal progenitors, thereby confirming the same kind of charismatic theory of poetry to which both Petrarch, on one hand, and Ficino (or Naldo Naldi), on the other, subscribe. In a letter to Bartolomeo Scala, Landino traces his poetic roots down through the branches of his family tree. The hereditary claims he makes would likely draw a smile from Ruth Benedict – “Heredity is an affair of family lines. Beyond that it is mythology.”³² But Landino’s family mythology is a good illustration of the mixing of ethnogenic fabling with personal achievement. Uncharacteristically, the poem begins with a demur:

Non ego Cecropia refero de stirpe parentes,
 nec domus antiquos Iulia praebet avos.
 Nullus et egregios titulus mihi signat honores,
 quos inhiat laudis ambitiosa sitis.³³

I do not go back to parents of Cecropian stock,
 nor does the Julian house offer me long-dead forebears.
 No title marks me out with splendid honors
 which ambitious thirst for praise desires.

The faux humility of these lines is belied by Landino’s meticulous, and wholly manufactured, lineage history leading from humble stock to staunch military defenders, and, by a circuitous route, through numinous poetic forebears to himself.

Nam licet ex humili populo mea surgat origo,
 casta tamen semper et sine labe fuit;
 nec Musis oidiōsa piis nec inutilis armis,
 nec venit haec patriae dissimulanda suae.
 (15–19)

For though my descent derives from humble folk,
 yet it was always pure and incorrupt [*sine labe*];
 not averse to the holy Muses nor vain in arms,
 nor did it need to be disguised to my native land.

The translation has a few unnecessary ambiguities, such as “incorrupt” and “vain in arms.” I prefer a more literal, if less poetic, version describing how Landino’s descent, though his origin “rose” [*surgat*] from humble people, “was always pure and without stain; / not hateful to the holy Muses nor useless in arms, / nor did this [descent] come disguised to its native land.” The subtle transition from humble

stock to loyal soldier familiar to the Muses, or even working under their auspices, permits Landino to weave his own poetic ambitions retroactively into the descent legend he himself is constructing.

Landino's ploy is by no means new to the Renaissance, but the phrase "holy Muses" takes on a special meaning when holiness no longer refers to the Greco-Roman pantheon but to Christian religious imperatives. Presumably, the Muses' role is subsumed in the holy inspiration of the Christian deity, blowing through Landino and his ancestors "as through trumpets." He traces his forebears to the battle of Campaldino, where some died and another returned victorious: "Here the Muses gave you, O my forefather Francesco, / the skill equal to those men of old in artful song" ["Hic avus, o Francisce, tibi cui Musa canora / arte dedit priscos aequiperare viros" ll. 25–26]. This passage is followed by a full classical catalog of Francisus's association to the *prisci poetae* and other geniuses boasting Apollonian inspiration, including Arion, Orpheus, and Linus: "Francisco of Fiesolan descent will be born / with such art as we saw in Linus the Theban" ["Nascetur Faesula Francisus origine tali / Dircaeum quali vidimus arte Linum" ll.55–56]. These lines are spoken by Lachesis, one of the Fates, implicitly preparing the genealogical path for Landino, whose poem continues hyperbolically through his ancestor Gabriele to himself:

Sic nobis, Gabriel, prima fraudate iuventa,
 complesti luctu saucia corda gravi;
 nam tibi me Musae, tibi me patruelis origo
 iunxit et ex uno sanguine ducta domus.
 (ll. 137–40)

So, Gabriele, stolen from us in the bloom of young manhood,
 you filled our stricken hearts with heavy sorrow;
 still, the Muses have joined me to you, and patrilinear descent,
 and our house, derived from a single bloodline.

The rare emphasis in a poem on "patrilinear descent" (*patruelis origo*), followed by that on a single bloodline, confirms Landino's consciousness of a very real technology of blood in the midst of what we would term a pure fantasy of poetic descent. The poem concludes:

Tu me Musarum magno inflammatus amore,
 Cirrhaie impulera scandere celsa iugi. . .
 At nunc si Phoebus velit aspirare canenti,
 magnorum et possim dicere facta virum,
 si qui rauca canit gracili nun carmina plectro,
 intonet altiloquo maior in ore sonus:
 Comus et egregii cernent me pignora Cosmi
 a patribus nusquam degenerasse meis.
 (ll. 141–42; 145–50)

Fired by a great love of the Muses, you drove me
 to scale the heights of the mountains above Cirrha. . .
 But now if Apollo wishes to inspire his singer,
 so that I might tell the deeds of famous men,
 if a greater sound shall thunder from the lips sublime
 of him who now sings rough songs to a slender lyre:
 Cosimo and his remarkable offspring will perceive
 that I have never sunk below my ancestors.

The blatant genealogical ambitions of the poem cry out for attention. Beginning with the humble Landino roots, the poet ends in a triumphal final passage linking references to Cosimo's offspring to the Landino forebears and to his own "slender lyre." This is a feat of Olympian heraldic skill.

But how much of this enfabling can Landino really believe? Or, to put it another way, how saturated by charismatic remythicization is the "rational" part of Landino's mind? Imitation seems to play no part in this particular version of poetic glory. The singer of "rough songs" ("*rauca carmina*") derives his technique not from ancient models, but expressly through a wildly charismatic genealogy associating him with Amphion, Orpheus, Linus, and, above all, Apollo. Yet a shadow of human agency remains in the singer's skills because the songs wouldn't be rough if they were wrought entirely by Apollo and the Muses.

In contrast, compare John Milton's declaration in *Paradise Lost* a century and a half later. In a characteristically insuperable assertion of *furor divinus*, he abrogates all responsibility for authorial agency:

If answerable style I can obtain
 Of my celestial patroness, who deigns
 Her nightly visitation unimplored,
 And dictates to me slumb'ring, or inspires
 Easy my unpremeditated verse.³⁴

Milton's claim is nothing if not puzzling as he begins the catastrophic narrative of Book 9. Consummately imitative in his epic ambitions, and stupendously calculating in the construction of his poem, Milton nonetheless expects, or pretends to expect, his readers to believe he has ceded the act of writing to Urania, Muse of astronomy. Everything he himself has dictated – he was blind, it will be remembered, and dictated the poem to amanuenses – has in fact been dictated to him while he was asleep. This claim is odd enough when we reflect on Milton's encyclopedic learning and his famous (or infamous) rhetorical and polemical skills. To think he had nothing to do with the painstakingly arranged references and the complex structure of *Paradise Lost* is not easy. But his claim of "nightly visitation[s]" and the dictation of the poem "unimplored" is even odder when considered in the context of imitation. *Paradise Lost* is expressly an imitative poem, an epic in Virgilian style written long after epics were a popular form; and, moreover, the poem comments on its own sense of imitation. How else to take,

for instance, Milton's assertion in the poem's opening lines that his song pursues "Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme" (1.16), a very close paraphrase of Ariosto's opening to the *Orlando Furioso*. Whether we call Milton's line ironic or, somehow, paradoxically original in the context of his poem, is it not at the very least a comment on imitation? Yet, according to Book 9, imitation has no role: Urania sings through Milton as through trumpets. The complex time scheme of the poem includes the conceit that, because Milton's subject matter predates all human propagation, other epics descend from his: for example, he is quick to point out that the gods of the Greco-Roman pantheon derive, through erroneous interpretation, from the fallen angels. Yet, at the same time, *Paradise Lost* the poem seems to boast of its transcultural epic pedigree as the literary descendant of Homer, Virgil, Ariosto, Du Bartas, and Spenser. This strange paradox, added to Milton's assertion that he was a mere conduit for Urania, makes his poem an embodiment of the conflict between genealogy and imitation, between unmanufactured charismatic descent and the deliberate flitting from flower to flower of human authorship.

Absence of imitation, or its frank denial, existed throughout the early modern period at the same time that theories of Roman *imitatio* and Aristotelian *mimesis* proliferated. This phenomenon only highlights the balance of valorization important to early modern humanists. As critics of the period, we should do more than merely acknowledge the religious sensibilities of the time. It would be more productive to recognize the parity of charismatic genealogy and *furor* to imitation and authorial agency. Admittedly, it seems counterintuitive to see a parallel between the Muses' benison or the deity's exhalations and rational choice. But until we can unlock the iron cage of skepticism and imagine that parallel as a living myth, I doubt we'll ever truly understand how transcultural genealogy grew from a Landino-like fantasy to a concept accepted as a *fait accompli*.

The floating corpse

By the end of the fifteenth century, a countermovement had begun under the influence of Aristotle's *Poetics*. For example, in his commentary on Terence's *Andria*, Angelo Poliziano, a recent convert from Neoplatonism to Aristotelianism, asserts that poetry begins in imitation: "Two causes above all are seen by Aristotle to have begotten the art of poetry: imitation and harmony. . . . Indeed, the study of imitation was introduced to men from boyhood. . . . The origin of poetry is in the imitation of the natural." ["*Duae potissimum causae videntur Aristoteli poetice genuisse: imitatio et concentus. . . . Est enim hominibus insitum usque a pueritia imitandi studium. . . . Ex imitatione naturalis poetices ortus est.*"]³⁵ This notion is quite a departure from the idea that poetry originates in hermetic mysticism, poetic fury, and divine inspiration. According to Vittore Branca, Poliziano is here deliberately offering a correction to his friend Marsilio Ficino's Neoplatonic version of poetic production.

Yet the question is more complex than simply either Neoplatonism or imitation. When, in the 1480s, Poliziano affirmed "aristotelicamente" the so-called natural

origins of poetry in imitation, Alberti had already recognized the danger of seeing poetry as solely an art of imitation. The danger, he observed, lay not merely in choosing the right models to imitate, and avoiding the wrong ones, but in the larger problem of how one responds to inherited knowledge. In his *De commodis litterarum atque incommodis* Alberti acknowledges that it would be impossible in his time period to find an idea or an argument made even by the most learned man that wasn't better said by one of the early and divine writers. He concedes therefore that if present writers expect to build a knowledge base, they would do well to imitate the ancients. But, significantly, Alberti is skeptical about inherited technique. He asks with what is probably faux puzzlement, "What shall we do? Maybe we will imitate with too little propriety that orator Isocrates who praised the most worthless tyrant, Busirides, and in written speeches censured Socrates, the best and most sacred philosopher." ["Quid igitur nos? Num parum commode Isocratem illum rhetorem imitabimur, qui Busiridem, nequissimum tyrannum, laudasse ac Socratem, optimum et sanctissimum philosophum, conditis orationibus vituperasse fertur."] This is a red herring, even if Alberti is prescient in highlighting the supposed plague of all practitioners of *imitatio*, specifically, whether the object of imitation is worthy, merely unworthy, or possibly even dangerous to imitate. It's a red herring because, as Alberti seems to suggest, the meaning of the imitation is built into the technique. Therefore, the model of imitation is not the peril. Rather, transforming the technique itself into an art form and claiming to inherit it *intact* can threaten the project of epistemological revision.

Where, then, does genealogy enter the picture? How can a technical skill supposedly grounded in practical results be integrated with a charismatic descent? The answer to these questions comes as a bit of a surprise (at least to me): I believe we should regard Renaissance imitation as *complementary* to vatic genealogy. To our way of thinking, this would probably mean the vatic element contaminates the technical element. But, again, we must be careful not to "un-saturate" the data. We should try to conceive exactly how humanist authors mixed the mantic qualities of the *poeta theologus/divinus* and the idealizations of ancient technique. Walter Benjamin speaks of the "aura" of a work of art, and the ancient models of imitation glowed with just such an aura. Benjamin claimed (in a much-debated essay) that "what withers in the age of technological reproducibility of the work of art is the latter's aura."³⁶ He defines the aura as "a strange tissue of space and time: the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be."³⁷ His alarm regarding the withering of a work of art's aura might well have been shared by early modern practitioners of *imitatio* had they not combined technique with *furor*, the former inextricably dependent on the latter: the imitated past was seen as the "unique apparition of a distance," despite its nearness – that is, despite the ineluctable modernizing and "localizing" of values. For humanist authors, the aura of works of art was preserved down the centuries by a charismatic genealogy that complemented the "technological reproducibility" of imitation – according to Auerbach's theory (discussed in Chapter 1), a vertical model of "Messianic" history. Hence the genealogy of technical prowess (*imitatio*) is simultaneously a genealogy of authors, a pedigree of auras handed down from ancient authorities like charismatic stepping-stones in time.

Nagel and Wood explain this “stepping-stone” characteristic in regard to architecture and artifacts: “The image or building took up its multiple residencies in time by presenting itself as a token of a type, a type associated with an origin, perhaps mythical or only dimly perceived, an origin enforcing a general categorical continuity across a sequence of tokens.”³⁸ The authors are referring to artifacts different in kind from genealogies but dependent on a similar relationship to the past in the construction of a systematic myth of sequence, a form of orderly and numinous descent. As Georgia Clarke has shown, the buildings themselves could expressly represent a transcultural inheritance. She cites the *Commentarii* of Pope Pius II who calls the Palazzo Piccolomini in Pienza, which he had built in the 1460s, “a lasting monument to his lineage”:

Pius’ reference to his lineage can perhaps be read, too, in the broader sense of his supposed ancestry . . . his baptismal names of Aeneas and Sylvius connected him to the founders of Rome, and the classical foundation myth of Siena added a further link to the classical past. The choice of a recognizably *all’antica* style for his palace would therefore have been entirely appropriate.³⁹

This description reflects a near-universal characteristic of humanism, the linking, in close proximity, of style, lineage, foundation myth, and what Nagel and Wood call “taking up . . . multiple residencies in time.” A linkage of this kind also suggests vertical history. “Multiple residences in time” all refer back to and descend from a source, a charismatic origin. The genealogy of “residences” creates a transcultural myth, superseding the possible emergence of “diachronic itineraries” despite the literally concrete manifestations of the past in present architecture, poetry, oratory, or painting.⁴⁰

In the confrontation of these transcultural residences and imitation, originality can be the sacrificial lamb. Vertical authenticity through history overwhelms even the transformative power of imitation, especially if, as with Quintilian’s “hidden forces” and “silent presences,” authorial agency loses its independence from supernatural direction. As has long been acknowledged, early modern authors referred to “originality” – at least in part – as the act of returning to an origin. Originality, therefore, had a vertical, even Messianic component. The notion of “horizontal” originality would probably have been alien to humanist eloquence, whether in poetry, devotional texts, or oratory, not because the humanists were humble about their diachronic skills (they weren’t), but because they functioned within or through a myth of transcultural descent. This myth, as I’ve said, was saturated by the notion of divine *furor* and of charismatic accumulation over time. As Quint observed in a discussion of Giorgio Vasari’s life of Michelangelo, “The claim to historical priority is vitiated since no human work of art is absolutely prior, originating outside history. Rather the artist’s individual greatness confers upon him an *originality* which makes him seem to transcend history.”⁴¹ There’s a valuable distinction here between history and originality. While it’s true, however, as Quint puts it, that no work of art originates outside history, Renaissance

treatises on imitation to my knowledge never refer to “originality” or the transcendence of history as being the result of individual achievement alone. Transcendence remains, as always, a charismatic inheritance, palpably a “gift of grace” *originating* with the deity – usually the Christian God, but often through stand-ins like the emptied-out Muses. Even granting that, for Vasari, Michelangelo was a special case, it is impossible to separate in his *Vita* what Quint calls “originality” from Quintilian’s “hidden presences,” Milton’s “nightly visits unperturbed,” or Landino’s “divino furore.” As Quint acknowledges, Vasari celebrates the artist’s birth as both a historical culmination and a divine event: “Vasari gives Michelangelo the epithet ‘divino,’ and represents his birth as a second Nativity, the coming of a messiah to God’s chosen people of the arts, the Tuscans. However hyperbolic, this language nevertheless describes a reality which, like the Christian revelation itself is historically structured. Michelangelo’s achievement is both apparently singular in its perfection and simultaneously the fulfillment of the history of Italian Renaissance art since Giotto. This history, which in relationship to Michelangelo’s career assumes the character of an evangelical preparation, is the subject of Vasari’s *Vite*.”⁴²

Quint’s idea of “evangelical preparation” is provocative and the history he identifies is patently vertical. Vasari’s Michelangelo manifests in his perfect skills and moral philosophy a lineage “residence” linking him to the past. But not merely that: the Tuscan artist is above all a bearer of divine charisma. Vasari begins, “Enlightened by what had been achieved by the renowned Giotto and his school, all artists of energy and distinction were striving to give the world proof of the talents with which fortune and their own happy temperaments had endowed them. They were all anxious (though their efforts were in vain) *to reflect in their work the glories of nature (di imitare con la eccellenza dell’arte la grandezza della natura)* and to attain, as far as possible, perfect artistic discernment or understanding.” Although he doesn’t elaborate, Vasari seems to be using “imitare” in an Aristotelian rather than Senecan or Horatian sense. More noteworthy, however, as the crescendo rises in the passage, is the question of whether he intends to pit Michelangelo against imitation, or to canonize him as the greatest imitator.

Meanwhile, the benign ruler of heaven graciously looked down to earth, saw the worthlessness of what was being done, the intense but utterly fruitless studies, and the presumption of men who were farther from true art than night is from day, and resolved to save us from our errors (*per cavarci di tanti errori*). So he decided to send into the world an artist who would be skilled in each and every craft, whose work alone would teach us how to attain perfection in design (by correct drawing and by the use of contour and light and shadows, so as to obtain relief in painting) and how to use right judgment in sculpture and, in architecture, create buildings which would be comfortable and secure, healthy, pleasant to look at, well-proportioned and richly ornamented. Moreover, he determined to give this artist the knowledge of true moral philosophy and the gift of poetic expression, so that everyone might admire and follow him (*lo eleggesse*) as their perfect exemplar in life, work,

and behaviour and in every endeavour, and he would be acclaimed divine (*e perché da noi più tosto celeste che terrena cosa si nominasse*).⁴³

The last phrase is, literally, “and so that we would call him a heavenly rather than an earthly thing” [“e perché da noi più tosto celeste che terrena cosa si nominasse”]. The implication of apotheosis is inescapable. But I think the key to understanding this extraordinary passage requires the recognition that it is a metaphor. Indeed, to recognize that, in Vasari’s *Weltanschauung*, Michelangelo’s arrival – “per cavarci di tanti errori” – can *only* escape condemnation (his own included) if taken in a metaphorical sense. The birth, as Quint says, is a representation, an analogy, a parallel in the world of the arts. As a metaphor, this claim – no doubt the subject of not a few jokes at the time – positions Michelangelo in a vertical genealogical history *Messianically related*, not to the Christian Messiah, but rather to prior charismatics. That he supersedes antecedents like Giotto both reveals the typical pattern of manufactured discontinuity with the recent past and confirms the devolutionary character of Vasari’s metaphor.

Yet Vasari and Landino, Milton, Ficino, and *furor* notwithstanding, the conflict between supernatural infusion and human agency did not go unaddressed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. On the contrary, as some of the more imaginative compromises between imitation and genealogy show, early modern theorists, though proof against atheistic detachment, recognized a need to explain the relationship of art to agency, history, and divinity. Along these lines, G. C. Delminio’s corpse in the river is a favorite of mine. Far more interested in a general theory than Vasari, whose aim is to conceptualize an aggregation of skills in Michelangelo, Delminio’s treatise, “Della Imitazione,” offers a curious description of poetic and rhetorical production halfway between authorial agency and effortless inheritance.

I remember once in Bologna that an excellent anatomist closed a human body in a perforated box and then exposed it to the current of a river, which, because of the perforations, after a few days consumed and carried off all the flesh from the corpse, which by itself showed the marvelous secrets of nature in the bones alone and in the remaining nerves. A fashioned body, sustained by bone, I compare to the model of eloquence, sustained by material and design. And just as that body could have been full of the flesh of a youth or of an old man, so the model of eloquence can be clothed in words that will flourish in a good century or that have already become faint. And just as to the eye it would be displeasing to see that the head of such a body were clothed in flesh and skin of a young man, but the neck in flesh and skin of an old man full of wrinkles, and even more if in one part were of flesh and skin of a fully virile male, in another of a very soft female, and mainly it had the arms of flesh appropriate to a man and the breast that recalls an ox or truly a lion, and it were not all uniform and that it should be in its most flourishing time, so would the ear and the intellect be ungrateful to hear and understand an oration that did not have all parts clothed in one language and were not all

exactly the same, and that could not be recalled to one century. And when it will be recalled to that [century] in which it will be more worthy of praise; and as much less in it one will see the language of another generation, so much less will it displease you. And in truth, if the fable of Pelops were history, I believe that it would have been strange to see his shoulder of ivory and the rest of his body different; such a sight would make by chance and more disagreeably a satyr, a centaur, a monster.⁴⁴

Written, with elaborate if insincere respect, contra Erasmus, Delminio seems to agree with Gideon Omer Burton's observation that "the moderate and respectable Erasmus had much more in common with the Ciceronian fanatics he ridiculed than is ever acknowledged by those who believe him to have closed the book on Ciceronianism."⁴⁵ Delminio's theory of imitation shows the perspicuity to recognize this mistaken impression. In particular, his striking analogy between the eroded flesh and skin of the body and, presumably, ancient techniques, strips away the burdensome body of past letters and gives full authority to contemporary agency among humanist writers. For eloquence in poetry or rhetoric to have any value in the present, according to Delminio, the ancient structures must be consigned to the coffin, just like the bones denuded by the flowing river of flesh and skin.

The role of technique, therefore, has little place in retrieval, or recalling the past. Delminio demands uniformity of time and language in the practice of *imitatio*. He dismisses the grafting of ancient language onto modern speech as monstrous, a kind of Pelops of the tongue. And he rejects the illusion of imitation as a technique that improves present-day expression with ancient ornaments. His metaphor implies that we can never know how the bones – that is, the ancient rhetorical structures – were fleshed out. As a result, some imagine a youth, some a wrinkled old man, some a virile man, and some a woman. Worse, it's possible in our error to adduce to those denuded bones the human arms and bestial bodies, a disastrous and hilarious image reminiscent of Horace's introduction to the *Ars poetica*:

Humano capiti cervicem pictor equinam
iungere si velit, et varias inducere plumas
undique collatis membris, ut turpiter atrum
desinat in piscem mulier formosa superne,
spectatutum admissi rerum teneatis, amici?
credite, Pisones, istis tabulae fore librum
persimilem, cuius, velut aegri somnia vanae
fingentur species, ut nec pes nec caput uni
reddatur formae.

(ll. 1–8)⁴⁶

If a painter chose to join a human head to the neck of a horse, and to spread feathers of many a hue over limbs picked up now here now there, so that what at the top is a lovely woman ends below in a black and ugly fish, could you,

my friends, if favoured with a private view, refrain from laughing? Believe me, dear Pisos, quite like such pictures would be a book, whose idle fancies shall be shaped like a sick man's dreams, so that neither head nor foot can be assigned to a single shape.

Delminio's implication, if we can assume he is alluding even mildly to Horace, is that imitation *itself*, as Erasmus and others theorized – and despite their rejection of Ciceronianism – reduces the contemporary practitioner to a laughingstock and his work to the dreams of a madman. Two things emerge from Delminio's unusual analysis: first, *imitatio* is a stable, graspable whole, like an art form from the past; and second, the skeleton of ancient technique, eroded by the river of time, offers nothing but structure to the present. The flowers of rhetoric will come from local fruit.

The camouflaged parrot

In "Farewell, Angelina," on the *Bootleg Series* recording, Bob Dylan sings a remarkably pertinent verse:

The camouflaged parrot he flutters from fear
 When something he doesn't know about suddenly appears
What cannot be imitated perfect must die
 Farewell, Angelina, the sky is flooding over
 And I must go where it's dry.

"What cannot be imitated perfect must die" is a phrase that seems to clash with the notion that a thing (or tradition) must be dead to be imitated. But I wonder if both ideas aren't simply mirror images. I wonder if both ideas are not, in effect, different ways of saying that past achievements, like old technologies, must be stabilized and turned into art forms, thereby providing the content of contemporary endeavor. Dylan's line is provoking, because, like the humanists, so much depends on how one defines "imitate." Granted, *imitatio* no longer exists in its early modern form. Granted, the relation of authorship to divine intervention has – at least in public discourse on poetry (if not in religion and football games) – utterly eroded. As has the apian metaphor as a mode of teaching rhetoric. Moreover, early modern concepts of imitation have been replaced by concepts of influence, whether T. S. Eliot's sense of tradition, Walter Jackson Bate's notion of untroubled influence, or Harold Bloom's version of an anxiety-ridden relationship. In contrast, both Denis Donoghue and Christopher Ricks suggest a more agon-free engagement with the past. Yet the genealogical impulse survives, and with it an ongoing belief in a numinous, charismatic authority that descends across cultures in the arts.

Widely imitated and, at the same time, much-maligned as a plagiarist and thief, Dylan held a generation in thrall as a poet and performer. His genius, as has often been noted, combines brilliant lyrics with melodies revealing a unique transformative authority in relation to his musical forebears. Little wonder, then, that he

should be depicted as the trunk of a genealogical family tree of popular American music (Figure 7.1). The transcultural idealizations of Landino, Petrarch, and Naldo Naldi – idealizations in which every determination is also an exclusion – don't seem so distant from Michael Foreman's graphic vision of 1968 poetic descent.

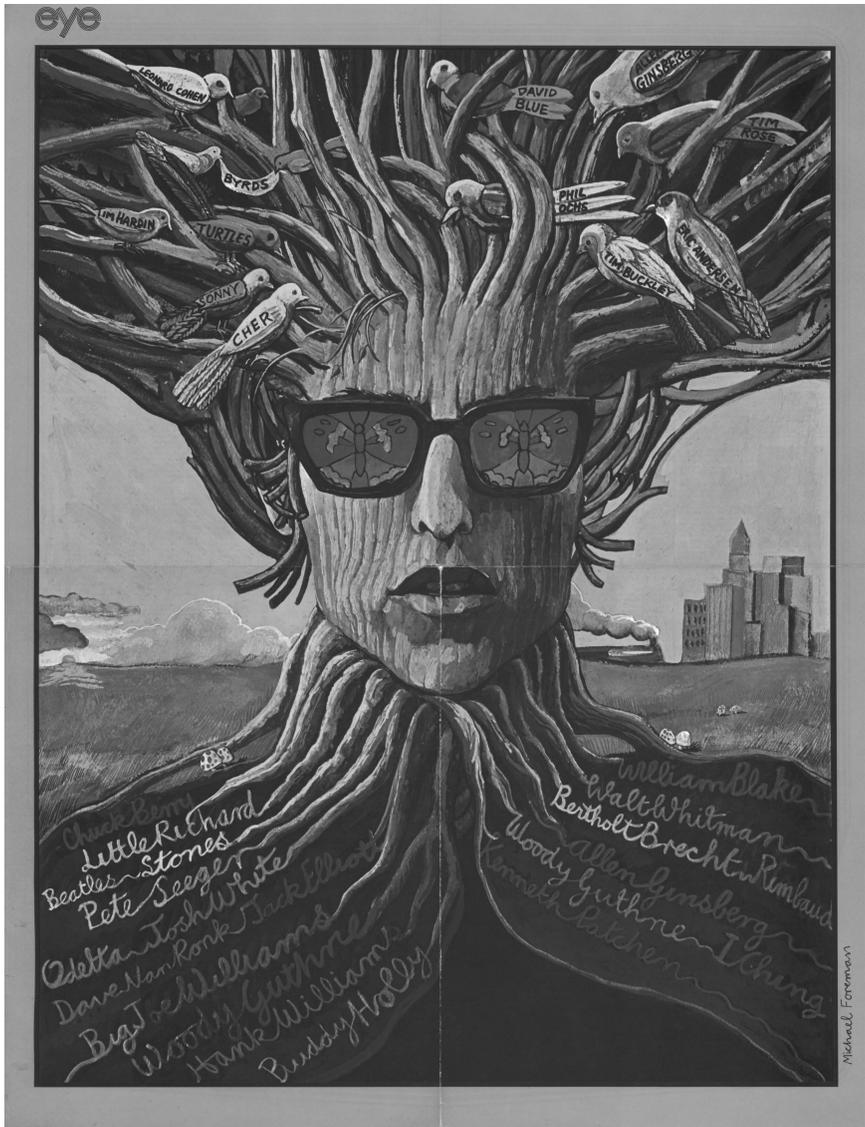


Figure 7.1 Bob Dylan poster by Michael Foreman, *Eye Magazine* (1968).

Notes

- 1 Ángel García Galiano, “Las polémicas sobre Cicerón en el renacimiento europeo,” *Escritura e imagen* 6 (2010): 241: “ya se sabe, toda onnovación formal lo acaba siendo, necessariamente, decontenidos y de visiones del mundo.” Translation from Galiano’s article abstract.
- 2 Significantly, Erasmus’s *Ciceronianus* links genealogy to the ape metaphor, providing an example in which a parent–son relationship is compared to the ubiquitous and derisive ape–Cicero relationship: “Cortesi does say he has no love for Cicero’s apes: ‘I would have a writer, my dear Poliziano, resemble Cicero not as an ape does a man, but as a son does a father’ – saying exactly the same as Poliziano had said. He pursues this point at great length, and then, as if forgetting himself, confesses that he would rather be Cicero’s ape than other people’s son. If ‘other people’ includes Sallust, Livy, Quintilian, Seneca, who wouldn’t rather resemble these writers as a son does a father, than resemble Marcus Tullius as an ape does a man?” *The Collected Works of Erasmus*, Literary and Educational Writings, ed. A.H.T. Levi, vol. 28.6, *The Ciceronian: A Dialogue on the Ideal Latin Style [Dialogus Ciceronianus]*, trans. Betty I. Knott, 444. [“At Cortesius negat sibi placere simios Ciceronis ‘similem,’ inquires, ‘volo, mi Politiane, non ut simiam hominis, sub ut filium parentis,’ eadem loquens quae dixerat Politianus. Id multis verbis prosecutus tandem velut immemor sui fatetur se malle esse simium Ciceronis quam aliorum filium. Si vox haec ‘aliorum’ complectitur Sallustium Livium Quintilianum Senecam, quisnon malit se esse similem illis, quemadmodum filius est patri, quam sic esse similis M- Tullio, quemadmodum simia similis est homini?” Latin version is taken from the hypertext, *Erasmus, Ciceronianus (Itinera electronica: Université catholique de Louvain)* [Hereafter *Itinera electronica* in the notes.] http://agoraclass.fltr.ucl.ac.be/concordances/erasme_ciceronianus/ligne05.cfm?numligne=171&mot=Cortesius#debutll. 1923–25. For the sake of readability, I have confined the long Latin quotations from Erasmus to the footnotes in this chapter. I have silently changed “u” to “v” where appropriate throughout the text.
- 3 David Quint, *Origin and Originality in Renaissance Literature: Versions of the Source* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983) 4.
- 4 Craig Kallendorf, “From Virgil to Vida: The *Poeta Theologus* in Italian Renaissance Commentary,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56 (1995): 45. He cites Salutati’s *De laboribus Herculis*, ed. B. L. Ullman (Zurich: [no pub.], 1951) 86. The humanists had powerful precedents for this kind of thinking. For example, Clement of Alexandria, despite his sharp rejection of the *prisci theologi* as deceivers, furnishes a seed of hope for the rescue of the Orphic genealogy. He attacks poetry as “occupied entirely with what is false,” as opposed to philosophy, and he speaks of poetry’s “deviation into legend” (*Protrepitkos*, in *Clement of Alexandria*, trans. G. W. Butterworth [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960] 162–63). Yet he notes that Aratus, Hesiod, Euripides, and Sophocles could not help but perceive the power of God in the universe and precociously introduced the divine truth to their audiences. Even Orpheus is rehabilitated by this theory: “The Thracian interpreter of the mysteries, who was a poet too, Orpheus the son of Oeagrus, after his exposition of the orgies and account of the idols, brings in a recantation consisting of truth. Now at the very last he sings of the really sacred Word” (166–67). Clement then quotes several lines by Orpheus in which the poet seems to urge recognition of past errors and to proclaim a single, self-begotten god. From this Clement concludes that “the Greeks received some glimmerings of the divine word, and gave utterance to a few scraps of truth” (167).
- 5 Erasmus, *The Collected Works*, 392.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 387. *Itinera electronica*, “Illud igitur in primis curandum erat Ciceronianis, ut intelligent mysteria Christianae religionis nec minore studio libros sacros evolvant, quam Cicero philosophorum poetarum iurisperitorum augurm et historicum evolverat. His rebus instructus ille fuit Cicero. Nos, qui nostrae professionis nec leges nec

- prophetas nec historias nec interpretes attingimus, contemnimus eriam et horremus, qui tandem erimus Ciceroniani?" (ll. 899–901).
- 7 G. W. Pigman III, "Imitation and the Renaissance Sense of the Past: The Reception of Erasmus' *Ciceronianus*," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 9 (1979): 155–77, 160.
 - 8 *Ibid.*, 161–62.
 - 9 Greene, *The Light in Troy*, 30.
 - 10 Erasmus, *The Collected Works*, 399. *Itinera electronica*, 1100, "Siquidem fieri potest, ut Ciceronianus sit maxime qui Ciceroni sit dissimillimus, hoc est qui optime aptissimeque dicat, cum diversa tatione dicat, nimirum rebus iam indiversum commutatis."
 - 11 For Valla's statement, see *De falso et ementita Constantini donatione*, ed. W. Setz, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Quellen zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters*, 10 (Munich: Monumenta Germaniae Historica, 1993).
 - 12 Greene, *The Light in Troy*, 19.
 - 13 But see Pigman, "Imitation and the Renaissance Sense of the Past," 160–61. I think this just promulgates the fiction at the heart of the imitation myth, that Ciceronian or poetic technique can be wrested from its original moral grounding and translated in a kind of virginal state to the service of contemporary mores.
 - 14 Erasmus, *The Collected Works*, 447. *Itinera electronica*, "Proinde de rebus sacris primum ea combibenda est persuasio, quae vere Christiano digna sit. Id si fiat, nihil videbitur ornatus caelesti philosophia, nihil suavius Iesu Christi nomine, nihil venustius vocabulis quibus ecclesiae lumina res arcanas tractarunt. Nec videbitur ullius sermo venustus, qui non congruit personae nec rebus est accomodatus, monstrosus etiam, qui res pietatis tractat verbis ipiorum quique materiam Christianam paganis nugis contaminat" (ll. 1970–72).
 - 15 Gianfrancesco Pico, "On Imitation, to Pietro Bembo," *Ciceronian Controversies* 31.
 - 16 *Ibid.*
 - 17 See McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation in the Italian Renaissance*, 28, for Petrarch's use of the "footsteps" metaphor.
 - 18 *Ibid.*, 31, 33.
 - 19 Greene, *The Light in Troy*, 19.
 - 20 Erasmus, *The Collected Works*, 342–43. *Itinera electronica*, ll. 23–42: "(Hypologus) Nondum igitur habet nomen?
(Bulephorus) Apud Latinos nondum, Graeci vocant zelodulean.
(Hypologus) Nuper accidit, an g-chronogus est malum?
(Bulephorus) Annos iam plus septem eo tenetur miser. Sed heus, conspecti sumus. Videtur huc gradum flectere; melius ex ipso cognosces quid sit mali. Initio Davum agam, tu fac orationi sub servias et fabulae partem agas.
(Hypologus) Equidem id faciam sedulo, si norim, quid mihi delegates.
(Bulephorus) Percupio veterem amiculum tanto levare malo.
(Hypologus) Etiamne rem medicam calles?
(Bulephorus) Scis esse dementiae genus, quod non totam mentem adimit, sed unam modo partem animi laedit, verum insigniter, veluti sunt qui sibi videntur capite taurina gestare cornua aut naso praelongo onusti aut ingens idque fictile portare caput exili collo innixum, mox com-minuendum, si se vel tantulum commoveant, non nulli sunt qui, quoniam se mortuo sarbitrantur, vivorum exhorrent congressum.
(Hypologus) Desine! Novi istud morbi genus.
(Bulephorus) Ad his medendum non alia via commodior quam si te simules eodem teneri malo.
(Hypologus) Istuc audivi frequenter.
(Bulephorus) Id nunc fiet.
(Hypologus) Huius fabulae non modo spectator, verum etiam adiutor libens fuero. Nam homini cum primis bene volo.

(Bulephorus) Ergo compone vultum et sume personam, ne quid illi sub oleat rem decomposito geri.

(Hypologus) Fiet.”

- 21 Barkan, *Unearthing the Past*, 15.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 24 *Ibid.* Lynn Catterson, when she was a lecturer at Columbia University, put forth the claim that the *Laocoön* was in its entirety a Michelangelo forgery. Although scholars have dismissed the credibility of this claim, the idea of Michelangelo creating the foundational model of antiquity for himself and other early modern artists is, to say the least, tantalizing in terms of *imitatio*. See Kathryn Shattuck, “Is ‘Laocoon [sic] a Michelangelo Forgery?’” *The New York Times*, April 20, 2005.
- 25 Erasmus, *The Collected Works*, 447–48. *Itinera electronica*, “Qui sic est Ciceronianus, ut parum sit Christianus, is ne Ciceronianus quidem est. . . . Huc discuntur disciplinae, huc philosophia, huc eloquentia, ut Christum intelligamus, ut Christi gloriam celebremus. Hic est totius eruditionis et eloquentiae scopus. Admondendi sumus et illud, ut quod in Cicerone praecipuum est imitemur. It non in verbis aut orationis superficie, sed in rebus ac sententiis, in genio consilioque situm est. Quid enim refert, si filius parentem oris lineamentis referat, cum ingenio mori busquesit dissimilis?” ll. 1974; 1976–80.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 441–42. *Itinera electronica*, l. 1870, “Rursus imitationem probo non uni addictam praescripto, a cuius lineis non ausit discedere, sed ex omnibus auctoribus aut certe praestantissimis, quod in quoque praecellit maxime tuoque congruit ingenio, decerpentem nec statim attextentem orationi quicquid occurrit bellum, se in ipsum animus velut in stomachum traicientem, ut transfusum in venas ex ingenio tuo natum, non aliunde emendicatum esse videatur ac mentis naturaeque tuae vigorem et indolem spiret, ut, qui legit, non agnoscat emblema Ciceroni detractum, sed fetume tuo natum cerebro, quem admodum Palladem aiunt e cerebro Iovis vivam parentis imaginem referentem, nec oratio tuo cento quispiam videatur aut opus musaicum, sed spirans imago tui pectoris aut amnis e fonte cordis tui pro manans.” Pigman, “Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance,” 10, translates “cento” literally, perhaps to refer to the practice of using only words found in Cicero. Compare Bruni’s advice on young women’s education.
- 27 Kallendorf, “From Virgil to Vida,” 45.
- 28 See my “Marsilio Ficino and Vatic Myth,” 116–17.
- 29 Marsilio Ficino, *Opera Omnia*, 2 vols. (Basel, 1576; rpt. Turin, 1962), 1:614. Translation from *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, 7 vols., trans. by members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, London (London: Shephard – Walwyn, 1975–), 1:70. See P. O. Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, trans. Virginia Conant (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1964) 309.
- 30 Cristoforo Landino, *Scritti critici e teorici*, ed. Roberto Cardini, 2 vols. (Roma: Bulzoni, 1974) 1: 141. Translation is mine.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 1: 142.
- 32 Benedict, *Patterns of Culture*, 15.
- 33 Cristoforo Landino, *Poems*, trans. Mary P. Chatfield (Cambridge, MA: I Tatti Renaissance Library, Harvard University Press, 2008) 41 (Book 1.24:3–6).
- 34 John Milton, *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose*, ed. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: Modern Library, 2007) 9: 20–24.
- 35 Angelo Poliziano, *La Commedia Antica e L’Andria di Terenzo*, ed. Rosetta Lattanzi Roselli (Florence: Sansoni, 1973) 3. See Vittore Branca, *Poliziano e l’umanesimo della parola* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983) 15, as well as Danilo Aguzzi-Barbagli, “Humanism and Poetics,” in *Renaissance Humanism*, 3 vols., ed. Albert Rabil Jr. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988) 3:97, who is misleading about the link between the origins of poetry and imitation.

- 36 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Reproducibility," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Howard Eiland, et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002) 104.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 29.
- 39 Georgia Clarke, *Roman House – Renaissance Palaces: Inventing Antiquity in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 36.
- 40 But see G. C. Delminio, who makes the analogy between the architect and imitation. He says the architect's mind through imagination fashions ancient bricks and marble: "En none altrimenti che le pietre fan sensibile quel modello che priva stava occulto nella mente dell'architetto, così le parole fan sentir la forma dell'eloquenza, la qual prima senza cadere sotto l'altrui senso, nell'animo dell'eloquente stava riposta" (Bernard Weinberg, *Trattati di poetica e retorica del Cinquecento* [Bari: Laterza, 1970] 183); see also 169–70 on architecture, as well as Delminio's somewhat defiant interpretation of the apian metaphor: "si come tutto il mèle venisse dalla virtù dell'ape, essa ce lo apparechia e chiamasi mèle e non fiori" (164).
- 41 Quint, *Origin and Originality*, 4.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, 2 vols., trans. George Bull (London: Penguin, 1965; 1987) 1: 325. Vasari, *Le Vite dei più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti* (Rome: Newton Compton, 1991) 1201: "Mentre gl'industriosi et egregi spiriti col lume del famosissimo Giotto e de' seguaci suoi si sforzavano dar saggio al mondo del valore che la benignità delle stelle e la proporzione mistione degli umori aveva dato agli ingegni loro, e desiderosi di imitare con la eccellenza dell'arte la grandezza della nature, per venire il più che potevano e quella somma cognizione che molti chiamano intelligenza, universalmente, ancora che indarno, si affaticavano, il benignissimo Rettore del cielo volse clemente gli occhi all terra, e veduta la vana infinità di tante fatiche, gli ardentissimi studii senza alcun frutto e la opinione prosuntuosa degli uomini, assai più lontana dal vero che le tenebre dalla luce, per cavarci di tanti errori si dispose mandare in terra uno spirito, che universalmente in ciascheduna cosa sia la perfezione dell'arte del disegno nel lineare, dintornare, ombrare e lumeggiare, per dare rilievo alle cose della pittura, e con retto giudizio operare nella scultura, e rendere le abitazioni commode e sicure, sane, allegre, proporzionate e ricche di varii ornamenti nell'architettura. Volle oltra ciò, acciò che il mondo lo eleggesse et ammirasse per suo singularissimo specchio nella vita, nell'opere, nella santità dei costumi et in tutte l'azzioni umane, e perché da noi più tosto celeste che terrena cosa si nominasse."
- 44 Weinberg, *Trattati di poetica e retorica del Cinquecento*, 2: 184: "Riccordami già in Bologna che uno eccellente anatomista chiusa un corpo umano in una cassa tutta pertugiata e poi la espose ad un corrente d'un fiume, il qual per que' pertugi nello spazio de pochi gioni consumò e portò via tutta la carne di quel corpo, che poi di sé mostrava meravigliosi secreti della natura negli ossi soli e nei nervi rimasi. Così fatto corpo, dalle ossa sostenuto, io assomiglio al modello della eloquenza, dalla materia e dal disegno solo sostenuto. E così come quel corpo potrebbe essere stato ripieno di carne d'un giovane o d'un vecchio, così il modello della eloquenza può essere vestito di parole che nel buon secolo fiorirono o che già nel caduto languide erano. E così come all'occhio dispiacerebbe veder che 'l capo d'un tal corpo fusse vestito di carne e di pelle di giovane, ma il collo di carne e di pelle di vecchio tutta piena di rughe, e più ancor se in una parte fusse di carne e di pelle di maschio tutta virile, in un'altra di femina tutta molle, e maggiormente se avesse il braccio di carne pertinente all'uomo et il petto di quella che si richiede al bue o vero al leone, e non fusse tutta equabile e qual dovrebbe esser nella sua più fiorita età, così sarebbe ingrato all'orecchio et all'intelletto l'udir e l'intender una orazione che non avesse tutte le parti vestite d'una lingua, e non fusse tutta a se medesima conforme, e che non potesse esser richiamata ad un secolo. E quando sarà richiamata a quello nel qual ella più sarà degna di laude;

e quanto meno in lei si vedrà lingua di altra generazione, tanto meno dispiacerà. E nel vero, se favola di Pelope fusse istoria, credo che strana cosa sarebbe stata a veder la spalla sua di avorio et il resto del corpo altrimenti; tal vista farebbe per aventura e più spiacevole un satiro, un centauro, un mostro.” Translation is mine.

45 Gideon Omer Burton, “Imitation in Renaissance Culture and Pedagogy,” PhD Diss., Dept. of English, University of Southern California, 1994, 112.

46 Horace, *Ars Poetica* (Epistle *Ad pisonem*), in *Satires, Epistles, and Ars Poetica*, 450–51.

Epilogue

The privilege of myth

In *The Beautiful and Damned* F. Scott Fitzgerald remarks, “The victor belongs to the spoils,” a clever and trenchant inversion of the famous coinage “To the victor belong the spoils.” Fitzgerald’s *mot* captures the spirit of this epilogue. For, as with the spoils of battle, so it is with myth. Our myths do not belong to us. We belong to our myths. And we belong to them because belonging is more important than the narratives that constitute the myths.

Cultural genealogy follows this pattern of belonging. The wholesale remythification of *translatio imperii studiique* produced in Renaissance schools and courts an atmosphere of unique privilege. Imitation and *furor*, and the compromises between them like Delminio’s floating corpse, conspired to bring this about. Belonging to the myth of transcultural descent meant entitlement to a new world of power and authority, a world of agency, *poesis*, and, above all, divine decree. These were the spoils of the cultural-genealogical myth.

Noah and the Argonauts

Even if Walter Raleigh planned *A Discourse of the invention of Ships, Anchors, Compass, & c.* as a treatise on the evolution of maritime technologies, his opening pages read more like a paean to devolution, a consummate descent myth. Raleigh insists on the superiority of the first vessel, Noah’s, as a bearer, not only of two-of-every-living-thing in material terms, but also of an original charisma – a genuine gift of grace – in the form of divine engineering.

That the Ark of *Noah* was the first Ship, because the Invention of God himself, although some men have believed, yet it is certaine, That the world being planted before the Flood the same could not be performed without some transporting vessels; It is true, & the success proves it, That there was not any so capacious nor so strong to defend itself against so violent, and so continued a powring down of raine, as the Ark *Noah*, the Invention of God himself.¹

Although Raleigh repeats the phrase “the Invention of God” twice, he doesn’t explain the extraordinary act of the proto-Christian God “inventing” a material object, something neither Yahweh nor the New Testament God ever does. And

it's especially puzzling that Raleigh should highlight a divine invention, given the Latin resonance of "discovery" in the word *inventio*: only by the most labyrinthine reasoning could one work out how the Creator could "discover" something. Yet Raleigh is emphatic about the superiority of divine technology: "or of what fashion or fabric soever, the rest, withall mankind perished, according to the Ordinance of God. And probable it is that the Anchors, whereof *Ovid* made mention of, found on high Mountains: *Et inventa est in montibus Anchora Summis*, were remaining of Ships wrackt at the generall flood."² "Fashion" and "fabric" refer to human making, but no human technology could survive the deluge. And, like a well-trained humanist, Raleigh has a classical reference ready to hand – the anchors mentioned by *Ovid* "prove" what *Genesis* records.

It may seem odd that the Bible should need supporting evidence at all, let alone from a pagan source. But in fact Raleigh's entire *Discourse* comprises a curiously miscegenated genealogy tracing the transmigration of maritime charisma. He describes a transcultural descent that stems from his unimpeachable Judeo-Christian source and embraces Greco-Roman gods, kings, civilizations, and legendary seafarers.

After the Flood, it is said, that *Minos*, who lived two discents before the War of *Troy*, set out Ships to free the Grecian Seas of Pyrats, which shews, that there had been either trade, or Warre, upon the Waters before his time also.

The expedition of the *Argaunants* was after *Minos*, And so was the plantation of *Tyrene* in *Africa*, by *Battus*, who was one of *Jasons* Companions, and that the *Tyrians* had Trade by Sea before the Warre of *Troy*, *Homer* tells us.

Others give the first Dominion upon the Waters to *Neptune*, who, for the great exploits he did in the service of *Saturne*, was, by after ages, called the God of the Seas. But the *Corinthians* ascribe the invention of Rowing vessels to a Citizen of their own called *Amenocles*, and that the first Navall Warre, was made between the *Samiens* and *Corcyriens*.³

As seems clear from the description of *Minos*, "who lived two discents before the War of *Troy*," Raleigh intends the genealogy, as a technique or tool, to give credence to the intermingling of Noah and semi-historical figures like *Minos*, *Jason*, and the *Tyrians*. He offers, as if in parallel, a possible origin of "Dominion upon the Waters" in the *Neptune* and *Saturn* relationship. But he quickly dismisses this possibility and debunks the origin myth with the *Corinthians*' claims. Although these are pre-Pauline *Corinthians*, Raleigh might expect his readers to think proleptically here, thus undermining the pagan descent with a presentiment of Christianity. On the other hand, he might simply want to multiply the legendary tales in order to ratify his own version of genealogical descent from Noah to *Minos* and the "*Argaunants*." It would be reasonable to ask why Raleigh writes the passage this way, why he strains the pure Pythagorean descent of maritime charisma with an admixture of pagan elements he intends to dismiss so abruptly. If the ark is going to lead to the Corinthian "rowing vessels," why include the *Saturn-Neptune* diversion at all? These questions are answered in part by the demands of establishing a myth of cultural genealogy. Twinned opposites of embodiment and supersession,

error and concord, must fuse to remythicize the past in Raleigh's account. Benjamin Braude calls genealogy "the most politically responsive of traditional genres," and if the full title of the *Discourse* is any indication, Raleigh meant to wield his opening genealogy as a political weapon: *A Discourse of the invention of Ships, Anchors, Compasse, & c. The first Naturall Warre, the severall, use, defects, and supplies of Shipping, the strength, and defects of the Sea forces of England, France, Spaine, and Venice, Together with the five manifest causes of the suddaine appearing of the Hollanders*. It would be difficult to find a more frankly political link among invention, technological advancement, and political enmity than that suggested by the final phrase promising to outline "the five manifest causes of the suddaine appearing of the Hollanders." Yet all nations, friendly and unfriendly share Noahic origin and the wandering maritime genealogy. Speaking of the descent of the sons of Noah, Braude notes that "The logic of common descent, once accepted, carried the assumption of a unified blood relation. This was consistent with the infinite capacity of people of the early modern era to connect and thereby explain everything. They still retained the traditional certainty, rooted in a belief in one god, that all were united and related through the single act of creation."⁴ Raleigh "unites" and "relates" even the Hollanders through the "logic of common descent."

This logic, however, which was amply prevalent in the early modern belief system, also caused a unique anxiety among humanist authors. Their problem, as we saw in the previous chapter, was somewhat different. It was their self-appointed (or self-anointed) mission to transform the achievements of past technologies into works of art, thus stabilizing and petrifying them. It was not enough merely to assert a common descent. They enacted the more modern genealogical imperative – the imperative of creating a *cultural* genealogy – in which every assertion of common descent carries with it an appreciation of the past frozen into an art form. This practice is especially true of past technologies. Consequently, in Raleigh's *Discourse*, the ark he describes isn't the Ark, but a work of art equivalent to the *Laocoön*, unearthed intact but read through modern lenses. Raleigh's ark is a genealogical interpretation, as much a consciously fashioned human fiction as the family tree of Noah's offspring in *The Genealogies of the Holy Scriptures* (see Figure 1.1). Raleigh does not so much worship Noah's Ark as recognize its charismatic potential as a source of power.

In the terms we've been using, Raleigh's ark is the "message" of the technological "medium" of shipping. He needs Noah and his offspring for their genealogical authority, but after establishing the priority and superiority of their line, his *Discourse* turns to a recitation of technological innovations. Each new technology further petrifies the original invention, creating an environment suitable for the institution of contemporary values and local politics. Yet the *Discourse* retains a genealogical tenor, as if readers were meant to infer descent relations. Technological advancements seem to descend unevenly, but in a kind of universal parallel:

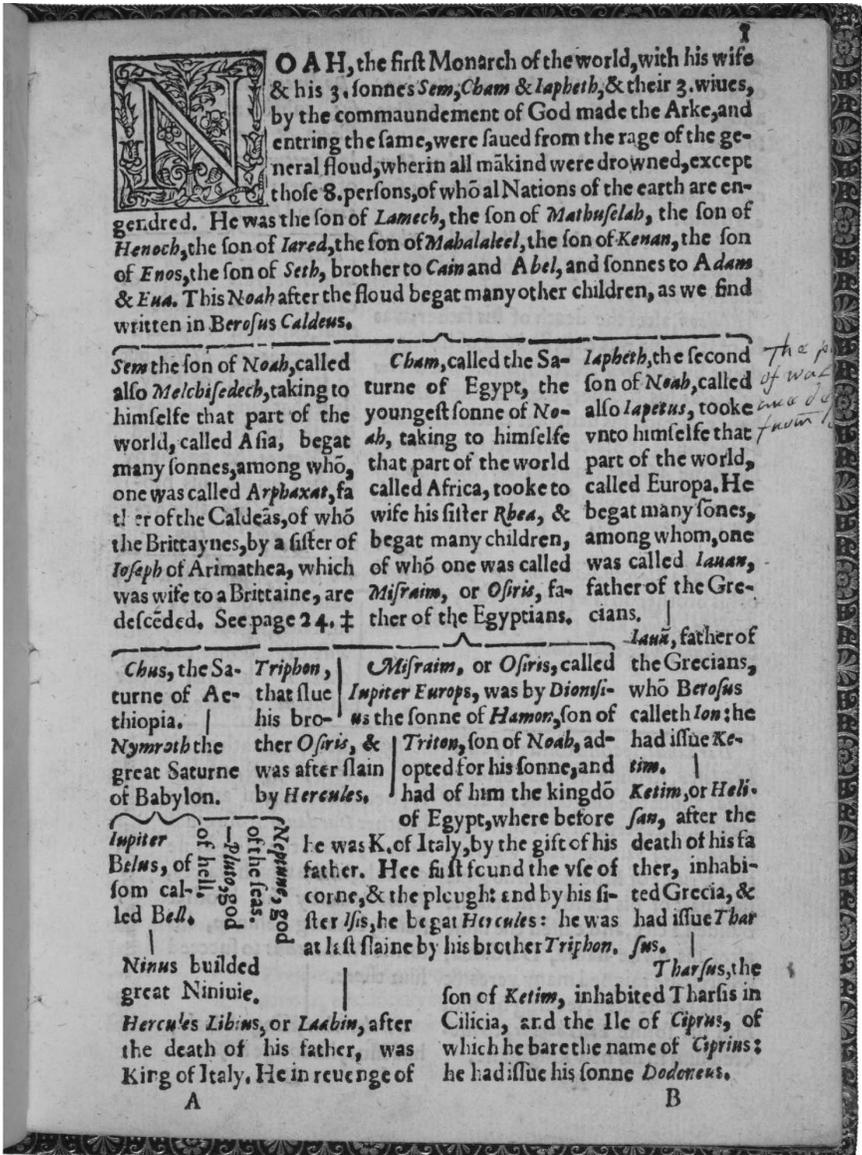
Ithicus History changed into Latine by St. *Hierome*, affirms, that *Griphon* the *Scythian*, was the inventor of long Boats, or Gallies, in the Northerne Seas; and *Strabo* gives the advise of the anchor, with two Hookees to the *Scythian Anacharsis*, but the Greeks to *Eupolemus*.

It is also said, that *Icarus* invented the saile, and others other pieces, and parts of the ships and Boats, whereof the certaine knowledge is of no great moment, This is certaine, that the Sons and Nephews of *Noah*, who peopled the Isles of the Gentiles, and gave their owne names to many of them, had vessells to transport themselves, long before the daies of *Minos*.⁵

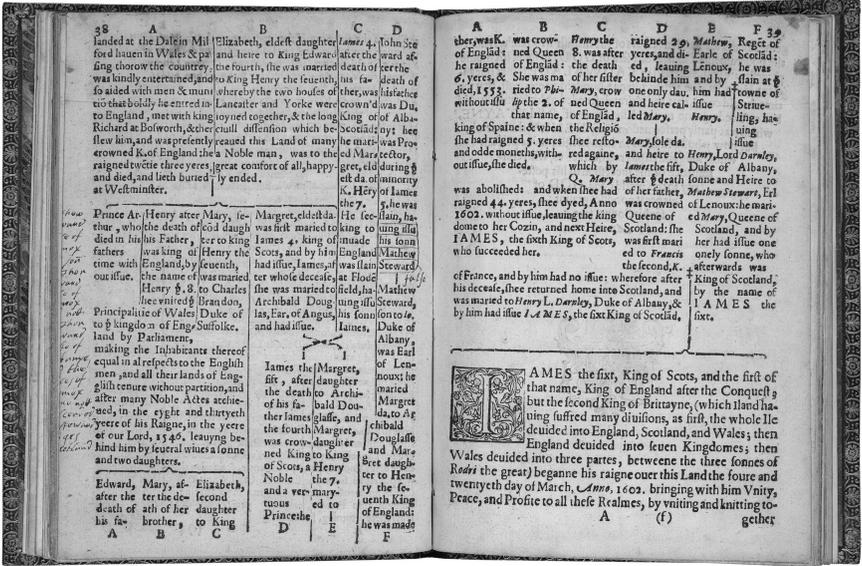
Invoking the virtually divine authority of Jerome and the antiquity of Strabo, Raleigh recounts a muddled history in which Griphon the Scythian invented long-boats, and either another Scythian or a Greek invented the anchor with two hooks. Icarus, he says, invented the sail – not the most responsible navigator, and not an inventor at all. One would wish for his father to design such an important ship’s component. But Raleigh quickly undermines even his own recitation by pointing out that “the Sons and Nephews of *Noah* . . . had vessells to transport themselves, long before the daies of *Minos*.” The conclusion is not so much an attempt, in Braude’s phrase, to use “the assumption of a unified blood relation . . . to connect and thereby explain everything.” Rather, Raleigh’s message of descent is more discriminating, and more hierarchical. At times, he gestures magnanimously toward universal genius: “The truth is, that all Nations, how remote soever, being all reasonable creatures, and enjoying one and the same Imagination and fantasy, having [have] devised, according to their means and materialls, the same things.”⁶ He highlights “reason,” and a common “Imagination and fantasy,” saying nothing of a common descent. But his insistence on a particular bloodline nevertheless takes precedence. While granting the proliferation of ships and sailing devices everywhere, he carefully nurtures the primacy of the original charismatic source: “I doe not think that any one Nation (the *Syrians* excepted) to whom the knowledge of the Arke came, as the story of the creation did, soone after *Moses*, did find out, at once, the device either of ship or Boate, in which they durst venture themselves upon the Seas: But being forced by necessity to passe over Rivers, or Lakes, they first bound together certaine Reeds or Canes, by which they transported themselves.”⁷

Raleigh’s language of primacy contradicts what Braude refers to as the “logic of common descent” in the early modern implementation of the Noahic blood myth. Rather, as might be expected, this language echoes the genealogical argument of *primus inter pares*, an argument vital to both of the descent-troubled sovereigns Raleigh served. As I mentioned earlier, Elizabeth had had her genealogy traced back to Eden. In 1604, George Owen Harry traced James’s bloodline back to Noah in *The Genealogy of the High and Mighty Monarch, James, by the grace of God, King of great Brittain, &c. with his lineall descent from Noah, by divers direct lynes to Brutus*, etc. The title goes on at length in its justification of James’s “rightfull Title, by lawfull descent,” beginning with the Hebrew Noah, the *fons origo*, and merging the Noahic line with the Trojan Brutus’s bloodline and from him with that of the British Cadwalader. The transcultural character of the genealogy is obvious; the original and divine charismatic authority of Noah and his sons is patently necessary for Harry’s “politically responsive” genealogy. The printed book, however, presents a textual stumbling block. Because each page of prose is divided into columns and separated by vertical lines, with those

columns sometimes subdivided, the genealogical narrative is, for all intents and purposes, unreadable. The columns, which are headed by letters of the alphabet, are meant to be read from the top to the bottom of a page and then to be continued on the next page. But, because the prose sometimes exceeds the column and runs



Figures 8.1 and 8.2 George Owen Harry, *The Genealogy of the high and mighty Monarch, James* (1604), pp. 1; 38–39. By permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.



Figures 8.1 and 8.2 Continued

into an adjoining column, following the ins and outs of parallel descent makes it impossible to read in one column alone. Pure columnar descent lines are regularly crowded out and invaded by adjacent columns, as if the page were a material representation of poorly planned yet unavoidable miscegenation.

Harry clearly hopes to impress his readers, not only with the sheer exhaustiveness of genealogical details, but also with his innovative technique of representing the lines of descent. The columnar structure gives technological authority to this utterly devolutionary practice. The more graphically complex the columns become, the more indissoluble the charismatic link between Noah and, finally at page 39, “James the Sixt, King of Scots.” Like the pyramidal chart in the previous chapter, Harry’s columnar geometry of genealogical descent transforms predictable transcultural relationships into a technologically innovative chart. The detail of the narrative is impressive, but Harry’s genealogical myth contains nothing particularly new. Echoing Geoffrey of Monmouth, the so-called Tudor Myth, and the French Troynovant legend, James’s descent, while managing a few home-grown peregrinations, reflects several centuries of cultural-genealogical exercise. But Harry nevertheless might be said to offer something new. The alphabetized columns of his text seem to structure a technically equivalent parallel between narrative descent history and the conventional genealogical trees he appends to the end of the book. Since Harry’s narrative is, at best, difficult to follow in its vertical format, it would seem that the message of the columnar approach is the very idea of technique rather than the prose itself – a technique whose message is, as we’ve seen before, the blood myth. Integrating narrative description and

geometrical strictness lends a *modern* authority to Harry's genealogy, which nonetheless inflexibly holds true to the early modern faith in Pythagorean descent of ancient charismatic sources.

By no means does Harry intend an inclusive logic of descent, but rather a myth of privilege and exclusivity rationalized by the truth-bearing tool of genealogical technology. In a discussion of Raleigh's *The Life and Death of Mahomet*, Dennis Britton calls attention to the critical importance of "genealogical origins" as "a site of contest." His observations reveal, simultaneously, the revisionary character of genealogical practice and – despite that disruptive tendency – its value in establishing long-standing legitimacy.

The Life also suggests that a fictive genealogy was created by Muhammad in order to establish both his legitimacy and that of Islam. Although one of the purposes of Raleigh's history is to discredit this legitimacy, what is significant here is that this discrediting is not based on religious belief but on genealogy – discrediting Muhammad's origins becomes a way to discredit the religion of all who "professe *Mahomet*." Genealogy legitimizes not only political rule but also religious truth . . . what is related as fictive genealogy works to discredit Islam as both a political and religious entity.⁸

It is ironic that Raleigh would attack Muhammed's "fictive genealogy" when, as we saw earlier, his wild series of descents from Noah's Ark to present-day shipping could only be characterized – charitably – as fictive. Because *all* cultural genealogy is fictive, the tendentious preference of one over another reveals, not the truth of a particular transcultural descent, but the contemporary argument for legitimizing local values. Cultural genealogies, whether written by Mahomet or Walter Raleigh, represent collocations of polemical valuations. For Raleigh, the Christian fiction trumped the others (or Others), even if his hedged genealogy of shipping, like Harry's over-complicated descent from Noah, sometimes indicates a sensitivity to the fictive or legendary elements of supposed transcultural pedigrees. To our ear, it is resoundingly hypocritical for Raleigh to scold Muhammed for being "fictive" in tracing the roots of Islam. But Raleigh is hardly alone in denying or ignoring or being blind to this hypocrisy: like every other early modern believer, he belongs to the spoils of his alleged privileged status.

The Book of Privileges

In 1493 Pope Alexander VI issued a decree granting to King Fernando and Queen Isabel of Castile ownership of all lands discovered and as yet *undiscovered* by Columbus. This remarkable granting of privilege *avant le fait* was evidently based on the fact that all the earth already belonged to the Christian god; it was therefore possible for the vicar of Christ to apportion land Lear-style as he saw fit:

From the plenitude of our apostolic power, the authority of Almighty God conferred on us in blessed Peter and the vicarship of Jesus Christ, which we

hold on earth, by these decrees we give, grant, and assign forever to you, your heirs, and successors, the monarchs of Castile and León, *all islands and continents found and to be found, discovered and to be discovered* toward the west and south of a line to be drawn from the Arctic pole, namely the north, to the Antarctic pole, namely the south, *whether these continents and islands to be found are in the direction of India or toward anywhere else.*

(my emphasis)⁹

No authority could offer more legitimization than a papal decree of this kind. As my emphasis shows, the decree imposed, for all intents and purposes, no geographical or temporal limit. Yet this extraordinarily sweeping license was not, finally, the main thrust of the papal bull. The decree justified its grant by requiring that the chief end of the expeditions would be the training and instruction in the Catholic faith of the peaceful inhabitants of the Indies and other lands. The pope's directive to Fernando and Isabel is amply clear on this score:

We command you, in virtue of holy obedience, to employ all due diligence, just as we also promise. We do not doubt that for the sake of your utmost devotion and royal greatness of soul you will appoint worthy, God-fearing, learned, skilled, and experienced men to these continents and islands to instruct their inhabitants and residents in the Catholic faith.¹⁰

Conversion became the counterpart of discovery, commerce, conquest, and colonization. As Helen Nader explains in her introduction to the edition I quoted, "The papal chancery balked at claiming *temporal authority* in the Americas. Instead the decree issued by the papal chancery, *Inter caetera*, granted Castile sovereignty on the basis of religion; the papacy tried to transform the enterprise of the Indies from a commercial venture grounded in the civil law into a missionary endeavor. *Inter caetera* introduced religious motives into the American enterprise from the first time by basing papal legitimation on conversion of the natives to Christianity."¹¹

Neither the monarchs nor the conquistadors, as Nader adds, paid much heed to the missionary element of the expeditions, at least not until the debates between Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan de Sepúlveda in the sixteenth century.¹² Yet any sanction by the papal authority would have been based on a canonical charismatic reality. It is impossible for us today, knowing the extent of imperialism's abuses, to experience the sense of license and privilege the decree afforded. The pope's evangelical requirement, though meant to complement commerce and future conquests, was based on and therefore introduced more than merely religious motives. It also brought to the forefront a genealogical imperative, threatening "automatic excommunication" (*Latae sententiae*) to anyone trespassing on the land rights of the Spanish monarchs and asserting the power to summon supernatural sanction:

Let no man infringe or with rash boldness contravene this our commendation, exhortation, requisition, gift, grant, assignation, ordinance, deputation, decree, mandate, prohibition, and will. Should anyone presume to attempt

this, he is informed that he will incur the wrath of Almighty God and of his blessed apostles Peter and Paul.¹³

This is a shatteringly profound threat: it adds to the possible penalty of excommunication the wrath, not only of “Almighty God,” but also of “his blessed apostles Peter and Paul” (the latter two seeming redundant after the first). It might have been that the Vatican “balked” at the Spanish entreaty, because, as Francisco de Victoria later claimed, “neither prince nor Pope can claim temporal lordship of the globe.”¹⁴ But the force and extent of the pope’s language would nevertheless have had an effect more of securing the land grants than of stipulating against out-and-out conquest.

From the perspective of cultural genealogy, however, the papal decree was a somewhat redundant gesture anyway, because the Spaniards had a pre-Columbian sovereignty over the Columbian and later conquests. According to Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo, Spain already owned the lands the “Summo Pontifice” granted to the king, queen, and their successors: his *Historias general y natural de las Indias* promised to tell of “la donacion é titulo apóstolico quel Summo Pontifize hizo destas Indias á los Reyes Cathólicos, don Fernando é doña Isabel, é á sus subçesores en los reynos de Castilla y de Leon (no obstante que antiquísimamente fueron de España segun mi opinion)” [“the gift and apostolic title that the Supreme Pope made of the Indies to the Catholic sovereigns, King Fernando and Queen Isabel, and to their successors in the monarchies of Castile and Leon (notwithstanding that, in my opinion, they (i.e., the Indies) belonged to Spain in very ancient antiquity”].¹⁵ By Oviedo’s reckoning, the explorers and conquistadors already belonged to their spoils, not unlike Raleigh’s contemporary shipwrights and Harry’s James VI who were preemptively imbued with power by their entrenched genealogical identities. The Spanish monarchs and their successors were already in possession of that which they sought to possess: according to Oviedo’s myth of privilege, they had a cultural genealogy licensing their annexation of the Americas. Oviedo is an accomplished and extremely inventive cultural genealogist. I won’t quote the entirety of his impressively circuitous pedigree for the pre-Columbian Spanish possession of the Indies. Suffice it to say that, citing Isidore, Pliny, Berosius, and others, he traces the roots of the Spanish monarchy from Mosaic times and proves eventually that, because of a corrupt linguistic substitution of *ph* for *b*, the Phrygians were really supposed to be called Brigos – that is, descendants of Brigo, the fourth Spanish king – and therefore “the Phrygians and the Trojans obtained their foundation and their origin from Spain” [“los de Frigia é troyanos ovieron de España su fundamento é principio”].¹⁶ He goes on, after pointing out that there was a king Hespero of Spain, to note that the “islas Fortunadas” were called the Hesperides by poets. But this, Oviedo insists, is another mistake of nomenclature, and if the poets believe it, they deceive themselves as well in many other things. He explains that Capo Verde (also called the Gorgades) is 1,200 leagues or fewer from the Fortunada Islands, “so that the poets did not refer to the Hesperides, but to the islands of our Indies” [“De manera que los poetas no tuvieron por las Hespérides sino á estas islas de nuestras Indias”].¹⁷

Not all historians required such an elaborate genealogical justification of the conquests. But few resisted the temptation to slot Columbus into an already existing descent of privileges. The ostensible stability of these descents revealed a great deal about the local efforts of humanist authors, and continues to reveal quite a bit about modern scholars who neglect the protean nature of myth at their own risk. Elise Bartosik-Vélez argues, for example, that Peter Martyr's linking of the Ligurian Admiral with Virgil's hero is the first narrative to transform the Columbian adventure into a version of *translatio imperii*. She says that Martyr cast Columbus "as a neo-Aeneas, the protagonist in the story of *translatio imperii*"; her coinage, "neo-Aeneas," confirms Richard Waswo's wide-ranging studies of the *Aeneid* as what he calls "our founding legend," and to some extent reflects his tendency to see the founding myth as a stable entity.¹⁸ Yet Bartosik-Vélez admits that "we do not know whether Martyr's early characterizations of Columbus were part of a conscious narrative strategy or whether Martyr simply appropriated the character of Aeneas from the Virgilian model of colonization and imperial transfer because it was in easy reach in his narrative 'toolbox' (as it was for all Renaissance humanists)."¹⁹ This is a significant admission, but whether Martyr's text was the seed of what eventually became a viral trope of civilizing transmission, Martyr only offers a mild, and predictable, form of transcultural grafting (what Camden calls "ingrafting"): the Columbus of the *Decades* is a sturdy "culture-bringer" (Waswo's term) setting out with his Virgilian values to found (*condere*) a new empire for Spain. So much depends on a narrative toolbox.

The first English translator of the *Decades*, however, was evidently not satisfied with the overwhelmingly prevalent (and oppressive) Virgilian myth. Richard Eden leaned more toward the more colorful Oviedo school of genealogical legitimization. In his 1555 introduction, Eden expands the genealogical auspices of the Spanish conquest beyond Aeneas alone, displaying the kind of imaginative flare customarily found in humanist treatises and outstripping Martyr in hyperbolic analogies for the Spanish conquerors:

It is therefore apparent that the heroical factes of the Spaniardes of these days, deserve so greate prayse that th[e] outour of this booke (beinge no Spanyarde) both worthely extolle theyr doynge above the famous actes of Hercules and Saturnus and such other which for their glorious and vertuous enterpryses were accounted goddes amonge men.

Eden begins the analogy-genealogy with Hercules and Saturn because they, like the *prisci poetae*, were legendary civilizers of savage peoples. Saturn was a god to begin with, but Hercules was "created" a god after his exceptional earthly deeds, as if, in heraldic terms, he had been brought into the divine peerage. Hercules also paves the way for Eden's hints at the fine line between euhemeristic transformation and immortal earthly fame. He continues:

And surely if great Alexander and the Romans which have rather obteyned their deserved immortall fame amonge men for theyre bluddy victories onely

for theyr owne glory and amplifyinge theyr empire obteyned by slawghter of innocentes and kept by violence, have byn magnified for theyr doinges, howe much more then shall we thek these men woorthy just commendations which in theyr mercyfull warres ageynst these naked people have so bled [led?] themselves towarde them in exchaunginge of benefites for victorie, that greater commoditie hath thereof ensewed to the vanquissed then the victourers.²⁰

This last phrase, a staggering and long-lived fiction, inadvertently confirms Fitzgerald's epithet. Eden would have us believe that the conquest of the Amerindians involved no "slawghter of innocents," nor was it "kept by violence." Rather, the conquistadors exchanged "benefites for victorie," to the end that the "vanquissed" received more "commoditie" than the "victourers." He adds that the Spanish took nothing from the vanquished people "but such as they themselves were well wyllynge to departe with, and accompted as superfluties, as golde, perles, precious stones, and such other."²¹ Again, the false claim, or delusion, is staggering in Eden's conceit that not knowing the value is the same as not wanting adequate payment. As Tacitus put it, in regard to the Roman conquest of the Highlands, "where they make a desolation, they call it peace."²² The notorious imperialist myth licensed spoils as the privilege of Roman peace. And, as in Roman Briton, so in New Spain. At least in Eden's mythicizing phrases, it would seem the Spaniards, conquest notwithstanding, were vanquished by the myth of their "mercyfull warres." They belonged to the privileges of this myth, their spoils.

The pre-metaphorical Columbus

It's almost as if we should divide Columbus as we divide epochs into pre-Columbian and post-Encounter versions. The results are somewhat surprising, given the later emphasis on Virgilian metaphors and Saturnal genealogies. Significantly, Columbus didn't see himself as a neo-Aeneas, a role he could easily have adopted. His letters show he had different and higher ambitions, but maybe he also saw a crucial difference between himself and the unfortunate Trojan: Columbus after all never lost his link to a homeland or his dependency on the benison of the Spanish monarchs. This would have made him, at least before all the metaphors took over, an unlikely Aeneas, homelessness being the wandering Trojan's signal characteristic.

Columbus saw himself as the heir of a less literary charismatic descent. He often invoked biblical figures like Moses, David, and Solomon as models or even precursors of his own mission. Jerry Phillips claims that he needed to define himself as an Israelite "to counter the radical novelty of the 'Indies,' their singular failure to conform to the East which Marco Polo had described . . . and thus [prevent] the random, inexplicable event, the excess of meaning implicit in the marvellous alterity of the Indies, from collapsing Columbus' faith in an ordered narrative of history."²³ I wouldn't use such polarizing terms – I prefer *plurality* to *alterity* – but

there is no question that transcultural genealogy provided a stabilizing instrument in the mayhem of cultural encounters. While it would be inaccurate to deem Israelite descent a countermeasure per se, certainly Columbus endeavored to subsume the marvels and horrors of the New World in a contemporary master narrative. But it must be underscored that he didn't suddenly produce Israelite descent to bandage the irruption of otherness he experienced. On the contrary, he already possessed Israelite descent: through the privilege of the Christian myth he already had a transcultural genealogical link to Moses, David, Solomon, and so forth. Long before he sailed, this cultural genealogy provided him with the charismatic justification to exceed his forebears. In the master narrative he believed, order was not so much temporally historical as vertically oracular, replete with sites (and sights) of apocalyptic, Dantesque proportions. Marco Polo's account was not Columbus's only source of imaginative expectation. Some of his sources would probably have led him to expect truly weird examples of alterity (even Marco Polo reports on the roc, a bird capable of lifting elephants with its beak). He also had Ptolemy, Pliny, and Strabo, Scholastic writing, fantastic tales of pilgrimages, and *mappae mundi* fueling his imagination.²⁴ With sources like these, we should probably reassess the meaning of excess of meaning.

As a scientist and as a Christian envoy, Columbus sought out and *expected* what seem to us excesses of meaning. Contemporary supersession was the promise of the living myth of Christian charismatic experience, just as it was the overarching achievement of humanist cultural genealogy. It is mistaken to think that "meaning" – including the meaning of the Aeneas legend – was a stable entity in the Renaissance, even if, paradoxically, genealogy was often invoked as a stabilizing authority. Meaning didn't – and still doesn't – exist except as a function of the fluidity of remythification. The kind of back-formation represented by descent from Moses and David, as we've seen in other chapters, was not meant merely to have a prophylactic effect against sudden shifts of stable meaning, although, through its association with a charismatic origin, it offered a kind of perennial anchor. But the assimilation of Israelite descent was a *fait accompli* for Columbus, a pre-Columbian reality – as was the Spanish possession of the Indies "antiquissimamente," according to Oviedo – a reality that allowed genealogical authority to legitimize difference as charismatic fulfillment.

Although Columbus's letters and narratives are notoriously difficult to interpret since they contain so much that is meant to impress Fernando and Isabel, still we can probably be sure that the novelties he found in the Indies had at least two important effects: one, of ratifying empirically the scientific aspect of his discoveries and, two, of fulfilling what he considered his charismatic inheritance. As I've noted throughout this book, we underestimate the extent to which belief in charismatic power saturated early modern conduct, and we therefore tend to misjudge and misalign responses to "excesses" of meaning. What to our imagination causes a hermeneutic irruption in the diachronic plane, to Columbus's imagination would have constituted synchronic perfection. His aims were far more eschatological and apocalyptic than geographical, and also more tuned to conversion than *condita*. As Pauline Watts puts it in a fine article, it is anachronistic to neglect Columbus's religious emersion because, for one thing, he had a "carefully

cultivated image of himself as ‘Christoferens’ – the Christ-bearer”. . . “a cipher of his destiny and his discovery as a preordained act of mimesis.”²⁵ The character of Columbus’s imitation (mimesis) was active rather than rhetorical, but, ineluctably, the meaning of the new technologies that produced a New World – the tools and techniques of shipping as catalogued by Raleigh – could only “mean” the content of an older technology when formulated as what Watts calls “a preordained act of mimesis.” The mimesis was preordained, as it were, because the older technology, the precursor to discovery, was prophecy. Columbus himself emphasizes as much in his unfinished collection, *The Book of Prophecies*, as Watts explains: “He believed that he was but playing out his particular role in the large scheme of providential history.”²⁶ Providential history and cultural genealogy inevitably merge in the early modern period, as I have tried to show, but, for Columbus at least, the imitation of a prophetic model produced, not a new and living *Aeneid*, but a remythicization of the Christian mission. He defined himself as an Israelite not to counter what he saw, but, rather, to celebrate what he had faith in – that is, that in belonging to the Christian myth system one is part of a devolutionary transcultural descent and a vertically oracular future leading to sites beyond earthly meaning.²⁷

In a sense, Columbus embodies the concatenation of genealogy and imitation. Those who come after him to record and criticize his achievements and failures, his imagination, his hungers, and his delusions, transform his history into an aesthetic object. I began the introduction to this book with Franz Borkenau’s reflections on culture, where he states (quoting Spinoza) that every determination is an exclusion, and, further, that “the cycles of the great high cultures are characterized by a singular evolution of style,” a kind of aesthetic reality by which they should be understood. It seems appropriate to conclude with another reflection on the style of historical periods. Early in the twentieth century, Benedetto Croce, in his influential contribution to the question of whether history is an art or a science, arrived at a conclusion serendipitously apt to reflections on cultural genealogy.

It is a mistake to introduce the historical as a third form of theoretical knowledge. This is not a matter of form but of content. As form, it is nothing other than intuition or something aesthetic. History neither seeks laws nor constructs concepts; it uses neither induction nor deduction; its job is *ad narrandum*, *non ad demonstrandum*; it does not construct universals and abstractions, but posits intuitions. The “this here,” the *individuum omnimode determinatum* is its territory, as it is the territory of art. History, therefore, is brought under the general concept of art.²⁸

The “this here” (“il questo qui,” in Croce) is not only the territory of “the wholly determinate individual” (Colin Lyas’s translation), but also the realm of local, contemporary values. Croce’s emphasis on narrative over demonstration exposes the theoretical confrontation between form and content. His dismissal of history as a “third form of theoretical knowledge,” and his revelation that the historical must be seen not as form but as content, brings him to conclude that history is an “aesthetic fact” (“fatto estetico”).²⁹ Croce’s sense of historical form as essentially an aesthetic

product resonates powerfully with Borkenau's perception of the "style" of high cultures. Cultural genealogy is both such a style and, at the same time, an aesthetic form of historical narration – a form of narration modernized by technical innovations to render the devolutionary narration as an unimpeachable source. As Croce says, however, that devolutionary narration must be brought "under the general concept of art." *Mutatis mutandis*, Marshall McLuhan might well have agreed.

Amiable vanity

In *The Moon and Sixpence*, Somerset Maugham's narrator reflects on being mistaken about a woman's love for her husband:

What I had taken for love was no more than the feminine response to caresses and comfort which in the minds of most women passes for it. It is a passive feeling capable of being roused for any object, as the vine can grow on any tree; and the wisdom of the world recognizes its strength when it urges a girl to marry the man who wants her with the assurance that love will follow. It is an emotion made up of the satisfaction in security, pride of property, the pleasure of being desired, the gratification of a household, and it is only by an *amiable vanity* that women ascribe to it spiritual value.³⁰

Yes, this passage is dated. Yes, for all his insights, Maugham was a male patently of his time with many typical prejudices regarding "women." Nevertheless, I find a strange and demoralizing parallel between his narrator's idea of the "amiable vanity" women need to delude themselves about love and the selective myopia that accompanies cultural genealogy. The "passive feeling capable of being roused for any object, as the vine can grow on any tree," reminds us how many false and incredible narratives grew on countless family trees in the Renaissance, and were believed. We're skeptical now of these *genealogie incredibili*, but I doubt we can consign myopia and delusion on the topic exclusively to the early modern past. That would be too convenient.

The proximity of delusion is always discomfiting. I'd like to think, however, that understanding the transcultural fictions of the humanists will impel us to shed our amiable vanity and to forgo our share in the charismatic myth of cultural genealogy. From time to time – while mounted on Rocinante – I imagine we will break free of the myth, and, as if from a chrysalis of privilege, refuse the spoils of our discourse and spread forth our wings. That would be an ideal, ongoing conclusion to this book. Yet, I wonder how far amiable vanity will carry us into the future of the illusion of cultural genealogy.

Notes

- 1 *A Discourse of the invention of Ships, Anchors, Compass, & c.*, in *Judicious and select essayes and observations by that renowned and learned knight, Sir Walter Raleigh* (London, 1650) 1–2. I have confined my discussion of Raleigh to this text, although it would seem appropriate to look for myths of privilege and divine viaticum in *Guiana*. But Raleigh short-circuits this possibility: both the *History* and the *Apologie* are

- embittered, defensive narratives, hardly the stuff of divine entitlement or supernatural compass reading.
- 2 Ibid., 2.
 - 3 Ibid., 2–3.
 - 4 Benjamin Braude, “The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 54 (1997): 107, 105.
 - 5 Raleigh, *A Discourse*, 3–4. He neglects to explain how Noah could have had nephews if neither his siblings nor in-laws made the trip on the ark. See Genesis 7:7.
 - 6 Ibid., 6.
 - 7 Ibid., 4.
 - 8 Dennis Austin Britton, “Islam, Race, and Political Legitimacy in Raleigh’s The Life and Death of Mahomet,” in *Early Modern England and Islamic Worlds*, ed. Bernadette Andrea and Linda McJannet (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011) 41.
 - 9 *The Book of Privileges Issued to Christopher Columbus by King Fernando and Queen Isabel 1492–1502*, in [Repertorium Columbianum vol. 2, ed. Helen Nader and Luciano Formisano, gen. ed. Geoffrey Symcox] (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) 96. In the Latin text, the sentences are in a slightly different order. See 350–51.
 - 10 Ibid., 96. For the Latin original, see 351.
 - 11 Ibid., 16.
 - 12 The conversion imperative eventually achieved public status, even if change was not forthcoming. For instance, Lope de Vega wrote a three-act play, *El Nuevo Mundo descubierta por Cristóbal Colón*, in which Columbus is absent after act 1 and the last two acts are devoted to dramatizing the conversion of the Indian natives. See Robert M. Shannon’s bilingual edition of the play (New York: Peter Lang, 2001); also, see Nishan Parlakian, “Lope de Vega’s Christopher Columbus Play (Re)Discover,” in *Columbus*, ed. Anne Paolucci and Henry Paolucci (New York: Griffon House, 1989) esp. 39.
 - 13 *The Book of Privileges*, 97. Latin: 352; for “automatic excommunication,” see 351, “sub excommunicatis late sententie pena.”
 - 14 Cf. Richard Waswo, “The Formation of Natural Law to Justify Colonialism, 1539–1689,” *New Literary History* 27 (1996): 745.
 - 15 Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo y Valdés, *Historia general y natural de las Indias*, ed. José Amador de Los Rios (Madrid, 1851) 2. www.archive.org/stream/generalynatural01fernrich#page/8/mode/2up. Translation mine.
 - 16 Ibid., 15.
 - 17 Ibid., 17.
 - 18 Elise Bartosik-Vélez, “*Translatio Imperii*: Virgil and Peter Martyr’s Columbus,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 46 (2009): 568. Waswo, “The Formation of Natural Law,” 743. This is not to detract from Waswo’s exceptionally detailed examination of the uses and abuses of the Aeneas legend in the imperialistic ventures of European cultures. Contrary to appearances in humanist idealizations, the Aeneas myth, like the Christian myth and all charismatic myths, survived through change and mild entropy in the master narrative, rather than through concrete stability. Columbus’s astounding revelations about the New World, and the redaction and interpretation of them by such authors as Martyr, would have fed the entropy-producing machine of charisma which was needed to sustain the myth. But maybe this is merely a technical quibble. See Waswo’s *The Founding Legend of Western Civilization: From Virgil to Vietnam* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1997) esp. 2–3 and chap. 4.
 - 19 Bartosik-Vélez, “*Translatio Imperii*: Virgil and Peter Martyr’s Columbus,” 576.
 - 20 Richard Eden, *The Decades of the New Worlde or West India. . . Written in the Latin tongue by Peter Martyr of Angheria* (London, 1555) ii(recto)–ii(verso).
 - 21 Ibid., iiv.
 - 22 Tacitus, *Agricola*, trans. M. Hutton and W. Peterson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914) 80–81, paragraph 30: “Auferre, trucidare, rapere, falsis nominibus imperium, atque, ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant.” [“To plunder, butcher,

- steal, these things they misname empire: they make a desolation and they call it peace.”]
- 23 Jerry Phillips, “Apocalypse or Utopia? Christopher Columbus and the Contest of Cultural Values,” *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* 1 (1994): 60.
 - 24 See Valerie I. J. Hint, “The Medieval World of Christopher Columbus,” *Parergon* 12 (January 1995): 9–27.
 - 25 Pauline Moffitt Watts, “Apocalypse Then: Christopher Columbus’s Conception of History and Prophecy,” *Medievalia et Humanistica* N.S. 19 (1992): 2, 1.
 - 26 *Ibid.*, 1.
 - 27 Hint, “The Medieval World,” 26: Columbus “expressed conviction that he was assisting the recapture of the Holy Places and the Second Coming by his search for gold.” In his letter to the Spanish monarchs on the Fourth Voyage, he makes his usual promises to supply gold, citing the 666 talents of gold brought to Solomon and the 3,000 talents David left in his will. Here he converts Fernando and Isabel into Israelite kings, which would not have been a costume so much as – again – an accustomed genealogical fulfillment. In the same passage, Columbus refers to a prophecy that “Jerusalem and Mount Zion will be rebuilt by Christian hands”; and, believing the site of the New Jerusalem to be “Cathay” (the New World) and that “this builder will come from Spain” (which he derived from Joachim the Abbot, who doesn’t actually mention Spain), he asks: “Who will offer himself for this task? If Our Lord will bring me back to Spain, I pledge myself in God’s name to convey that man here in safety” (300–01). Columbus also believed he’d found the geographical location of Paradise, as his third letter reports. See *The Four Voyages of Christopher Columbus*, ed. and trans. by J. M. Cohen (London: Penguin, 1969) 300–01; for the description of the Orinoco as one of the rivers of Paradise, see 221–22.
 - 28 Benedetto Croce, *The Aesthetic as the Science of Expression and of the Linguistic in General*, trans. Colin Lyas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 29.
 - 29 See Benedetto Croce, *Estetica: Come Scienza dell’Espressione e Linguistica Generale* (Bari: Laterza, 1922).
 - 30 W. Somerset Maugham, *The Moon and Sixpence* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2006; rpt. of 1919 edition) 82–83.

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Plate 2.1 *Arbre de Jessé*. New College MS322, f7r. Psalm 1, initial B, Tree of Jesse, illustration from the “De Braile Psalter,” ca. 1250 (vellum), Brailes, William de (fl.c.1230). By permission of the Warden and Scholars of New College, Oxford/ The Bridgeman Art Library.



Plate 3.3 Angolo Bronzino, *Cosimo de' Medici as Orpheus* (ca. 1538–40). By permission of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.



Plate 3.4 Rembrandt, *Self-Portrait as the Apostle Paul* (1661). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands/De Agostini Picture Library/The Bridgeman Art Library.

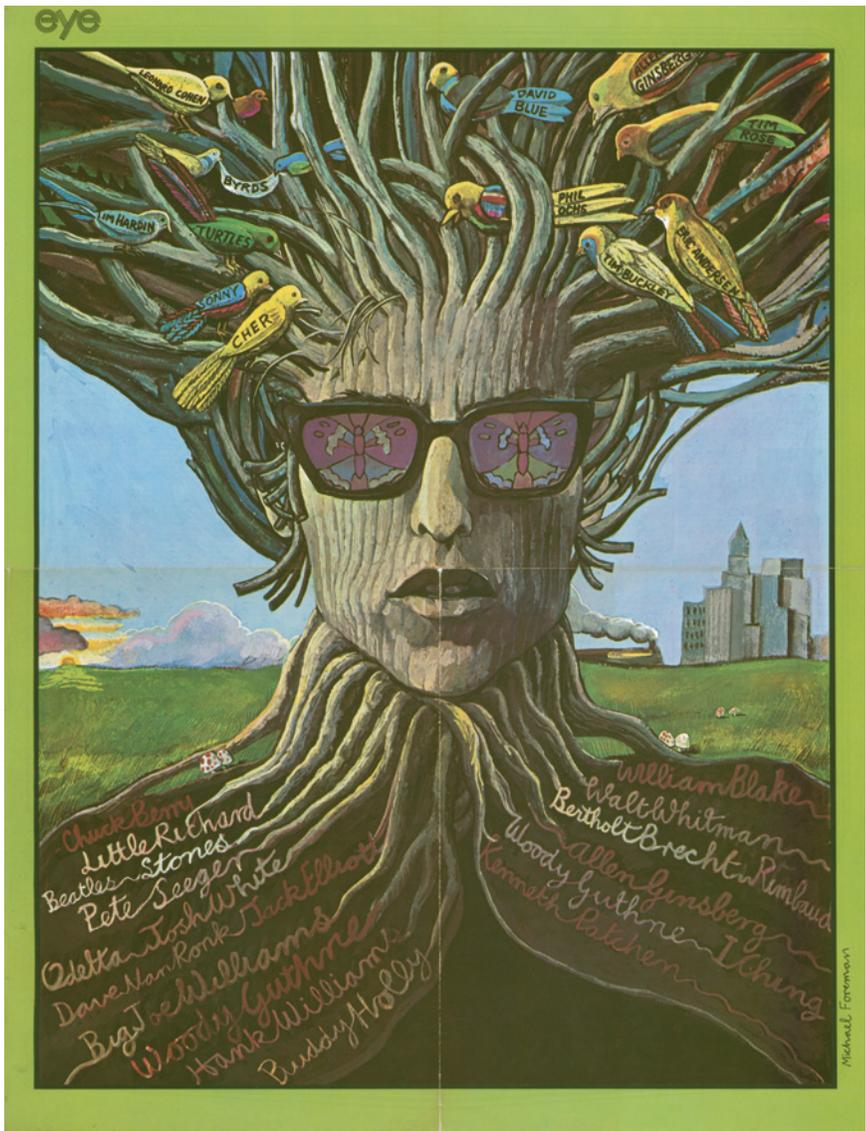


Plate 7.1 Bob Dylan poster by Michael Foreman, *Eye Magazine* (1968).