

## Enriching the Judgement: Fulke Greville and Didactic Drama

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*Fulke Greville (1554–1628) was profoundly interested in the association between drama and didacticism. His two extant plays set in the Ottoman court, Alaham and Mustapha, can be read as polyphonic articulations of moral instruction and political counsel, representing processes of ethical formation as experienced by young men. These plays turn Greville’s tragic theories into practice. Greville’s school and university education helped to form his ideas about how drama should instruct. The didactic impulse we see in the drama can be read against two other works: the Dedication to Sidney and his longer philosophical poem, ‘A Treatie of Humane Learning’.*

In the *Dedication to Sidney*, that idiosyncratic combination of memoir of a lost friend, *apologia* for his own career, and literary treatise which he probably wrote in the early 1610s,<sup>1</sup> Fulke Greville states his ‘purpose’ for his two tragedies: ‘to trace out the highways of ambitious governors, and to show in the practice of life that the more audacity, advantage and good success such sovereignties have, the more they hasten to their own desolation and ruin.’<sup>2</sup> The two verbs Greville selected – ‘to trace out’ and ‘to show’ – present drama as a deliberate and instructive exposition of human behaviour, and imply a didactic tendency in fact borne out by the plays. Greville, like most of his contemporaries, had in mind the well-worn Roman rhetorical trio of *docere, delectare, movere* as the orator’s (and, by extension, the author’s) main responsibilities,<sup>3</sup> but when we read his plays, rather than balancing these three objectives equally, Greville usually tends to prioritise *docere* – ‘teaching’ – as his most conspicuous aim.

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<sup>1</sup>Fulke Greville, *A Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney*, in *The Prose Works of Fulke Greville*, Lord Brooke, ed. John Gouws (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 3–135 (hereafter *Dedication*). For dating, see Gouws’s Introduction, pp. xxi–xxiv).

<sup>2</sup>*Dedication*, p. 133.

<sup>3</sup>See, for instance, Cicero, *De optimo genere oratorum* in Cicero, *On Invention; The Best Kind of Orator; Topics*, ed. and trans. H. M. Hubbell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949), pp. 356–57: ‘The supreme orator, then, is the one whose speech instructs, delights and moves the minds of his audience. The orator is in duty bound to instruct; giving pleasure is a free gift to the audience, to move them is indispensable.’ [For the original Latin text, see p. 356. \[Side by side Latin/English translation?; which page does English appear on and which the Latin?\]](#) 

Greville shared an interest in drama as instruction with his closest friend, Philip Sidney, who, over two decades before the *Dedication* was drafted, in *The Defence of Poesy* (c. 1580–83), had also noted tragedy's expository power, praising 'the high and excellent tragedy, that openeth the greatest wounds, and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue'.<sup>4</sup> At first, Greville's earnestly articulated wish 'to trace out the highways of ambitious governors' might look muted next to Sidney's flamboyant leap from exalting the 'high' genre in lofty Aristotelian terms to using such a bloody metaphor. But having jolted his reader with wounds and ulcers, Sidney immediately moves on to the emotional impact of tragedy, which he aligns with its didactic strategy – 'that with stirring the affects of admiration and commiseration teacheth the uncertainty of this world' – and teaching, by the paragraph's end, has become central: tragedy has become 'so excellent a representation of whatsoever is most worthy to be learned'. Sidney's statement that plays can teach the 'uncertainty of this world' looks like a more open-ended lesson than the apocalyptic 'desolation and ruin' faced by Greville's protagonists, but both authors agree on the awful force of tragic plots to instruct through the representation of painful experience, manifest either as 'wounds' or 'desolation'. Yet while Sidney's 'stirring the affects' of course relates to the rhetorical *movere*, acknowledging drama's impact on the passions, Greville's showing and tracing seems more cerebral: as dramatic spectators (or, as we shall see, dramatic *readers*), we are to be taught a lesson and then to go away and think about it.

At moments in the *Defence*, Sidney appears to place *docere* as equal to *movere*, but his representation of tragedy's didacticism in the *Defence* is complicated. First, he praises Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton's Inns of Court play, *Gorboduc* (first performed in 1561; printed in 1565), in Horatian terms as 'full of notable morality, which it doth most delightfully teach', then criticises it as 'very defectuous in the circumstances'; in its failure to observe the Aristotelian unities, it is 'faulty both in place and time' and so 'might not remain as an exact model of all tragedies'.<sup>5</sup> As well as noting the imperfect exemplarity of this contemporary vernacular tragedy, Sidney also satirises the limits of scholarly exposition of tragic drama when thinking about Sophocles's *Ajax*, arguing (in keeping with the pro-fiction apologetics of his treatise), that representation has more force than study:

... let but Sophocles bring you Ajax on a stage, killing or whipping sheep or oxen  
thinking them the army of Greeks with their chieftains Agamemnon and Menelaus, and

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<sup>4</sup>Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesy*, in *Sidney's 'Defence' and Selections*, pp. 1–54 (p. 27).

<sup>5</sup>Sidney, *Defence of Poesy*, pp. 44–45.

tell me if you have not a more familiar insight into anger than finding in the schoolmen his *genus* and difference.<sup>6</sup>

Sidney's point is that performance tends to be more meaningful than textual analysis. His intellectuals are the predictable objects of humanist mockery – logic-chopping 'schoolmen' – however, Sidney's judgement functions not only as anti-scholastic satire but also as a point of divergence between his and Greville's characterisations of how drama works best. For while Sidney privileges watching over reading – 'Ajax on a stage' to 'finding in the schoolmen' – in the *Dedication*, Greville insists on his plays being read rather than performed, explicitly referring to *Alaham* and *Mustapha*, his two late Elizabethan tragedies, as 'no plays for the stage'.<sup>7</sup>

Rather than a spectator, then, for Greville a *reader* is paramount, and this individual and his role tend to be mentioned in the *Dedication* whenever the tragedies come up:

I ... conceived that a perspective into vice, and the unprosperities of it, would prove more acceptable to every good reader's ends than any bare murmur of discontented spirits against the present government.<sup>8</sup>

The *Dedication* explores the reader's function almost as fully as the writer's: if Greville's own stated 'purpose' was 'to trace out the highways of ambitious governors' through his plays, then his 'good reader's ends', too, seem to rest on moral lessons, on gaining 'a perspective into vice'. Self-laceratingly comparing his ability to Sidney's 'dexterity' in writing the *Arcadia*, Greville describes his own 'genius' (in the Latin sense of 'inclination' rather than the more modern meaning of 'extraordinary talent'):

I found my creeping genius more fixed upon the images of life than the images of wit ... in this ordaining and ordering matter and form together for the use of life, I have made these tragedies no plays for the stage.<sup>9</sup>

The ideas articulated here help us understand not only how Greville thought plays should be constructed, but also his argument for literature's value: it needs to be for the 'use of life'; otherwise, what is its point?

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<sup>6</sup>Sidney, *Defence of Poesy*, p. 17; on Sidney and Greek tragedy, see also Sarah Knight, "'Goodlie anticke apparel'": Sophocles' *Ajax* at Early Modern Oxford and Cambridge', *Shakespeare Studies*, 37 (2009), 25–42 (p. 25).

<sup>7</sup>*Dedication*, p. 134.

<sup>8</sup>*Dedication*, p. 90.

<sup>9</sup>*Dedication*, pp. 134–35.

We see a related argument made in his philosophical poems. Having considered the significance of public service for the politician, Greville asks a related question about the value of historiography in the poem ‘An Inquisition upon Fame and Honour’. He emphasises here the practical significance of reading both for one’s reputation in posterity and for perceived worth in the present:

For else, what *Governour* would spend his dayes,  
In enuious trauell,<sup>10</sup> for the publike good?  
Who would in *Bookes*, search after dead mens wayes?  
Or in the *Warre*, what Souldier lose his blood?  
Liu’d not this *Fame* in clouds, kept as a crowne;  
Both for the Sword, the Scepter, and the Gowne.<sup>11</sup>

Greville aligns the scholar – accompanied here by his characteristic attributes of ‘*Bookes*’ and ‘*Gowne*’ – with the soldier and politician as a means of presenting reading as an active and practical process, although none of these professions is idealised. In fact, Greville implies that none of these men is altruistic and labouring unselfishly for the ‘publike good’, but is motivated instead by ‘*Fame*’. What is significant for the question of didacticism in Greville’s writing is the idea that reading – especially if one is searching for ‘dead mens’ *exempla* – can be as practical an activity as governing or military activity: Greville represents the act of reading, whether the book concerns history or tragedy, as the opposite of a passive, abstracted or remote action. It is, on the contrary, dynamically central to public life.

Pivotal to this hard-thinking, active ideal is the fact that Greville’s plays were written to be read. We have already seen his own characterisation of them as ‘no plays for the stage’: at the very end of the *Dedication*, Greville states that he kept his plays offstage because he thought they would suffer by comparison with others’ work (the ‘great and good spirits’ who seem to be his contemporaries) but immediately beforehand he writes that his ‘arguments’ – plots – particularly, were:

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<sup>10</sup>The meaning of ‘enuious trauell’ here is likely ‘extremely punctilious hard work’.

<sup>11</sup>Fulke Greville, ‘An Inquisition upon Fame and Honour’, in *Poems and Dramas*, ed. Geoffrey Bullough, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1938), I, 192–213 (hereafter ‘Inquisition’), I, 193 (stanza 7). For the most recent edition of Greville’s works, see *The Complete Poems and Plays of Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke*, ed. G. A. Wilkes, 2 vols (Lewiston: Mellen, 2008); for a brief discussion of Greville’s rhetorical question in context, see also D. R. Woolf, *The Idea of History in Early Stuart England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 12.

... nearer levelled to those humours, counsels and practices wherein I thought fitter to hold the reader than in the strangeness of witty fictions, in which the affections and imagination may perchance find exercise and entertainment, but the memory and judgement no enriching at all; besides, I conceived those delicate images to be over-abundantly furnished in all languages already.<sup>12</sup>

This prioritisation of ‘memory and judgement’ over the ‘affections and imagination’ echoes the argument in ‘Of Humane Learning’ that ‘Vse therefore must stand higher than delight’.<sup>13</sup> As its title makes clear, this long philosophical poem offers one of Greville’s most sustained meditations on the function of the intellect and how the mind absorbs and processes what it perceives and learns. The idea of practical reading is central to both works: attentive engagement with Greville’s plays will make the reader think of ‘humours, counsels and practices’ (biological composition or inclination, advice, and custom being real things). The text’s potential is therefore fulfilled: the play becomes subsidiary to the behaviour it prompts, avoiding the risk outlined in ‘Of Humane Learning’ that those ‘who with Bookes their nature ouer-build | Lose that in practise, which in Arts they gaine’.<sup>14</sup> As Kathryn Murphy has persuasively argued of this particular poem, there is a central paradox: ‘[t]hat rules should not be drawn from books is itself a rule in a book.’<sup>15</sup> But if Greville cannot escape the written word as a medium for articulating his epistemological ideas, and cannot avoid the risk that his readers may ‘ouer-build’ their characters by the act of reading, at least he can remove one temptation posed by ‘Arts’ (which could mean here ‘scholarship’, ‘creativity’, or ‘cunning stratagems’, or, indeed, carry all three senses): he can insist that his plays should have no performance life.

Greville’s reasons for not writing for the stage encompass both what he implies are the misdirected energies of his contemporary commercial dramatists and his own didactic purpose, but also, more subtly, he makes it clear that the plays have a ‘true stage’ (this is his peroration in the *Dedication*) – ‘that stage whereon himself is an actor, even the state he lives in’.<sup>16</sup> Greville often uses the choruses in his tragedies to articulate this *theatrum mundi*

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<sup>12</sup>*Dedication*, p. 134.

<sup>13</sup>Greville, ‘A Treatie of Humane Learning’, in *Poems and Dramas*, ed. Bullough, I, 154–191 (hereafter ‘Of Humane Learning’), I, 170 ([stanza 67](#)).

<sup>14</sup>‘Of Humane Learning’, I, 163 ([stanza 36](#)).

<sup>15</sup>Kathryn Murphy, ‘Fulke Greville’s Figures of Repetition’, *Essays in Criticism*, 65.3 (2015), 250–73 (p. 250).

<sup>16</sup>*Dedication*, p. 135.

conceit: by the late sixteenth century, this had become something of a commonplace, but he manages to develop it in interesting ways. The subject-matter of the two plays invites detailed consideration of how the worlds of politics and spectatorship might intersect: both are set in an Ottoman empire increasingly fascinating to Greville and his contemporary dramatists, as diplomatic and trade relations with the Islamic world began and gathered momentum during Elizabeth's reign.<sup>17</sup> For Greville, the scope this region offered for representing political power dynamics was all-important; Katrin Röder has argued, for instance, that Greville was interested in the 'expanding superpower' of the Ottomans as an 'intercultural space which is formed through regular interaction with Christian nations', especially in the later versions of *Mustapha*.<sup>18</sup> In that play, Greville represents Sultan Süleyman I's (r. 1520–66) execution of his son in 1553, a real-life event looked on with shock by the rest of the world,<sup>19</sup> while *Alaham* shows a son overthrowing his father, the Sultan of Ormuz, a fictionalised tale which nonetheless taps into the same interest in violent dynastic politics.<sup>20</sup> The relationship between *oikos* and *polis*, and the value to the dramatist of exposing both spheres – or showing the wounds, in Sidney's terms – to create absorbing theatre, has of course been fundamental to tragic drama from Aeschylus onwards, and Greville's characters seem highly aware of their place within this tradition of triangulating tragedy, state politics, and family. The first chorus in *Mustapha*, 'of Basha's or Caddies' – from the Ottoman Turkish *pāšā* (high-ranking officer) and Arabic *qāḍī* (judge) – speak of the importance of performance and theatricality to the political élite:

if we quit this *People-stage*,  
 Thrones know not where to act those fancie-playes,  
 Which catch the lookers on so many wayes.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>See Gerard MacLean and Nabil Matar, *Britain and the Islamic World, 1558–1713* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), esp. chap. 2, 'First Diplomatic Exchanges', pp. 42–78.

<sup>18</sup>Katrin Röder, 'Intercultural "Traffique" in Fulke Greville's *Mustapha*', *Literature Compass*, 11.8 (2014), 560–72 (p. 562).

<sup>19</sup>On the contemporary popularity of both Süleyman and Mustapha/Mustafa, and widespread sadness at their deaths, see Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet, *A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 28.

<sup>20</sup>For an account of which sources Greville has historically been understood to have used, see Warner G. Rice, 'The Sources of Fulke Greville's "Alaham"', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 30.2 (1931), 179–87.

<sup>21</sup>Greville, *Mustapha*, in *Poems and Dramas*, ed. Bullough, II, 63–137 (hereafter *Mustapha*), II, 75 (Chorus Primus, lines 46–48).

In *Alaham*, too, in the third chorus ('A Dialogue; of Good, and Euill Spirits'), the world becomes a gruesome stage with men and women merely corpses. As the Good Spirits despairingly say: 'Let *warre*, which (tempest-like) all with it selfe o'rethrowes, | Make of this diuerse world a stage for blood-enammeld shows.'<sup>22</sup> In the 'Inquisition upon Fame and Honour', as we have seen, Greville aligns the soldier with the politician and historian; here, warfare is compared to the staging of drama (a sense we also see reflected in the contemporary English term, 'theatre of war'). In these variations on the *theatrum mundi* theme, human life is represented as performance, certainly, but the understanding is that the potential artificiality of spectacle, its 'staginess', does not make it remote from lived reality: life is a '*People-stage*', in this worldview, inevitably, where '*warre*' creates 'blood-enammeld showes', which Greville may *represent* metaphorically but which are not as a necessary consequence unreal. Greville's 'blood-enammeld showes' recall Sidney's injunction that tragedy should 'open ... the greatest wounds': however rhetorically polished the description of violence, it is still empirically brutal.

So we can see that Greville's intention to use drama 'to show in the practice of life' led him constantly to argue for applied knowledge. He does not swerve from repeating 'practise' with very focused purpose in 'Of Humane Learning': for just a few examples, we might think of lines from stanza 75: 'For *Sciences* from *Nature* should be drawne, | As *Arts* from *practise*, neuer out of Bookes'; stanza 118: 'Their Theoricke then must not waine their vse, | But, by a practise in materiall things'; and stanza 68:

Againe the actiue, necessarie Arts,  
Ought to be briefe in bookes, in practise long;  
Short precepts may extend to many parts,  
The practise must be large, or not be strong.<sup>23</sup>

This idea of being 'briefe in bookes' and ready to use '[s]hort precepts' is important for Greville. Excess and superfluity are figured as undesirable, echoing the suggestion made in the same poem that one might 'ouer-build' one's nature by excessive reading, and the *Dedication*'s impatience with ideas 'over-abundantly furnished in all languages'. According to these arguments, concision and expediency have a more obvious value for the pragmatist.

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<sup>22</sup>Greville, *Alaham*, in *Poems and Dramas*, ed. Bullough, II, 138–213 (hereafter *Alaham*), II, 192 (Chorus Tertius, lines 81–82).

<sup>23</sup>'Of Humane Learning', I, 172; 183; 171.

In any case, Greville's education in the 1560s, both at Shrewsbury School and at Jesus College, Cambridge, helped to shape his theories of reading and learning, resulting in what surfaces rom/out of?] his writing as reading for 'active' and 'practical' benefit. In terms of his intellectual formation, the education Greville received may have helped shape his thinking about processes of instruction. In broader socioeconomic terms, too, Greville belonged to the rising gentry class, which, as Warren Boutcher has suggested, particularly exemplified in the late sixteenth century 'the intensified combination of social, political and intellectual ambition that lay *behind* investment in the institution of humane learning'.<sup>24</sup> Greville and Sidney both attended Shrewsbury School in the north-west Midlands near the Welsh border, between 1564 and 1568. The account of household purchases kept by Thomas Marshall, the Sidney family steward, as well as the Shrewsbury School statutes drafted around the same time, inform us that, like many other Tudor schoolboys, Greville and Sidney were taught through abridged classical and humanist works. The Marshall account-book includes a payment of three shillings for 'a written booke being an abstracte of M<sup>r</sup> Astons doinge of tullies offices and ludouicus diologue wise'.<sup>25</sup> Thomas Ashton was the school headmaster, a St John's Cambridge alumnus. Marshall's references are to two schoolroom standards, Cicero's *De officiis* – variously translated as 'On Duties', 'On Services', or 'On Obligations' – and 'Iudouicus diologue wise', Juan Luis Vives's *Introductio ad sapientiam* (1524). This is not a dialogue, in fact, but a series of maxims, so either Marshall described it wrongly or, like Cicero's text, it was also adapted for the classroom. The accounts also include a four-pence copy of 'Calvines chatachisme', bought in February 1565,<sup>26</sup> which gives us a sense both of the school's confessional orientation and also how many school-texts were turned into epitomes (abstracts) and dialectical forms (catechisms; dialogues).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Warren Boutcher, "'Rationall Knowledges" and "Knowledges ... drenched in flesh and blood": Fulke Greville, Francis Bacon and Institutions of Humane Learning in Tudor and Stuart England', *Sidney Journal*, 19.1–2 (2001), 11–40 (p. 16).

<sup>25</sup>Malcolm William Wallace, *The Life of Sir Philip Sidney* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915), p. 410 (Appendix: 'Thomas Marshall's Book of Accounts').

<sup>26</sup>See Alan Stewart, *Philip Sidney: A Double Life* (2000; repr. London: Pimlico, 2001), p. 46.

<sup>27</sup>For a fuller discussion of Greville's and Sidney's school studies, see Sarah Knight, "'Not with the Ancient, nor yet with the Modern": Greville, Education and Tragedy', in *The Measure of the Mind: Fulke Greville and the Literary Culture of the English Renaissance*, eds Russell J. Leo, Katrin Röder, and Freya Sierhuis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

Related to this interest in useful reading, inculcated very early on in Greville's life, is the fact that in the *Dedication*, he privileges 'images of life' over 'images of wit'. Like imagination or 'phantasy' in the early modern sense, 'wit' in his works is an unstable mental faculty and an unfixd term: sometimes it means 'admirable intelligence', sometimes 'natural disposition', and sometimes 'ostentatious erudition'. In the *Dedication*, Greville's repetition of 'images of life' and 'for the use of life' pushes the reader to think of his drama either as reflecting or of practical value in lived reality. It is impossible to think of Greville's plays as 'realistic' in a modern psychological or behavioural sense, but this is probably not what he means by 'images of life'. Greville's twentieth-century biographer, Ronald A. Rebholz, argues that '[m]oving naturally in abstraction and generality, Greville's mind was at home in the categories of philosophy and theology'. In Rebholz's view, Greville 'also had an acute sense of reality': 'He studied history and, with unusual clarity, scrutinised himself, his contemporaries, and their institutions.'<sup>28</sup> This characterisation of Greville's varied intellectual pursuits is supported by the exploration of all these different academic disciplines in his poems and plays; but Greville seems not to have [\[verb missing here? comprehended, recognised, understood\]](#) the 'abstract' and the 'real' in the terms implied by Rebholz's account, namely, as a contrast between 'abstraction and generality', as manifest in philosophy and theology, on the one hand, versus 'reality', exemplified by historiography, individuals, and institutions, on the other.

Greville's readers have clearly struggled with his didactic purpose. The Romantic author, Charles Lamb (1775–1834), for example, included several excerpts from *Alaham* and *Mustapha* in his *Specimens of the English Dramatic Poets* (1808). In a footnote, Lamb writes:

These two Tragedies of Lord Brooke might with more propriety have been termed political treatises, than plays. Their author has strangely contrived to make passion, character, and interest, of the highest order subservient to the expression of state dogmas and mysteries. ... Whether we look into his plays, or his most passionate love-poems, we shall find all frozen and made rigid with intellect.<sup>29</sup>

Greville's plays, for Lamb, are riddles: writing of two of Greville's female characters, Camaena from *Mustapha* and Caelica from *Alaham*, Lamb suggests that 'it requires a study equivalent to the learning of a new language to understand their meaning when they speak'.

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<sup>28</sup>Ronald A. Rebholz, *Life of Fulke Greville* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. xxiv.

<sup>29</sup>Charles Lamb, *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets, who Lived about the Time of Shakespeare, with Notes* (London: Moxon, 1849), p. 264.

While he likens Greville to ‘a being of pure intellect’, manifesting ‘all knowledge’, his works are ‘frozen’, ‘rigid with intellect’, according to the ‘understanding’ ‘a most Tyrannical pre-eminence’. We will come back shortly to Lamb’s views that the plays are more like ‘political treatises’ and that their author has more in common with Roman historians and Florentine political theorists than with classical dramatists, but we should pause briefly on Lamb’s characterisation of Greville as only cerebral, ‘rigid with intellect’.

Lamb distinguishes sharply between a dramatist who foregrounds ‘passion, character and interest’ (it seems clear that Shakespeare stands behind this half of Lamb’s comparison) and one who subordinates those to ‘the expression of state dogmas and mysteries’: this second tendency is why, for Lamb, in Greville’s works, ‘we shall find all frozen and made rigid with intellect’. It seems true that Greville was not particularly *trying* to *[acti?]* *movere*, to engage with and manipulate his readers’ emotions: the intellectual activity stimulated by the plays’ conversations and aphoristic content was all-important, and ‘sympathetic expression’ would not have mattered much. One could argue that sensibility, affect, and the power of the imagination in thought, which we probably associate more readily with Lamb and his Romantic contemporaries, and which Lamb thought Greville lacked, were never part of Greville’s literary plan. Thought is necessary, reading is particularly necessary, but all of this must be *acted* upon and *applied* in order to have any value. So Lamb’s chilly scholar-Greville is poignantly antithetical to what Greville set out to be. His contemporaries praised Greville’s erudition: in a Latin poem given as a New Year’s gift in 1594 to William Herbert, *Nobilis, sive, Vitae mortisque Sydniadis synopsis*, the physician, Thomas Moffett (1553–1604), praised Greville for his *antiquis moribus, summa doctrina* (staunchly old-fashioned customs, highest learning) *[direct quote and translation or paraphrased?]*,<sup>30</sup> but Greville’s own representation of what constituted *summa doctrina* is somewhat more complicated, and certainly Lamb’s characterisation makes an undoubtedly clever author seem too much like George Eliot’s Casaubon. It is easy to draw up a dichotomy between (to use Lamb’s terms) the ‘intellectual’ and the ‘sympathetic’, but such a division runs counter to what Greville seems to have thought he was doing in his writing. He articulates little interest in stirring the passions through his drama, certainly, but at the same time he criticises what he saw as scholarly dryness as remote from experience, arguing instead for the value of knowledge applied to what he continually calls ‘practice’ and ‘use’. That said, his writing is full of

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<sup>30</sup>Thomas Moffett, *Nobilis, or A View of the Life and Death of a Sidney and Lessus Lugubris*, trans. and ed. Virgil B. Heltzel and Hoyt H. Hudson (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1940), p. 26.

serious if not always absolutely followed-through epistemological thought: he continually reflects on the impact of his works on the reader and their practical value, and seems particularly interested both in what the human mind absorbs through the act of reading and in the relationship between writing (whether drama, poems, or historiography) and truth.

If Lamb found Greville's works 'rigid with intellect', a few years after the *Specimens* appeared, another English Romantic, Robert Southey, in his *Select Works of the British Poets from Chaucer to Jonson* (1831), characterises Greville's cerebral qualities more admiringly, calling him 'one of the profoundest thinkers that ever clothed his thoughts in verse'.<sup>31</sup> Despite – or, perhaps, because of – this profundity, Southey also sees Greville as 'certainly the most difficult of all our poets'.<sup>32</sup> Although they were writing over two centuries after Greville, at a moment in English literary history when (for Lamb, certainly) 'sympathetic expression' mattered more than 'pure intellect', these Romantic views expose what might seem a contradiction we encounter in Greville's plays. We have seen that Greville articulates in the *Dedication* his wish that his drama might impart lessons. But that 'difficult' quality Southey identifies – which we might see as an inclination towards contradiction, paradox, and (one of Greville's favourite terms in the plays) 'doubt' – has hindered, for many of his readers, understanding of his work. So how do we make sense of this, given Greville's interest in instruction, particularly when we think of the emphasis Elizabethan pedagogy and humanist teaching, in general, placed on good instruction through clear communication; the provision of – as the subtitle of Ascham's *Scholemaster* (1570) puts it – a 'plaine and perfite way of teachyng'? Colliding with this lucid ideal, Greville presents us with the paradox of a didactic impulse that often seems wilfully obscure.

Throughout his writing, but particularly in the plays and the verse treatise, 'Of Humane Learning', completed in the 1610s, Greville was suspicious of what he describes as 'images' – fictional unrealities – and their power to distract from matters of real importance. Greville is wary of the power of the faculty of imagination, in early modern terms, the 'phantasy'. He articulates this idea at one point in 'Of Humane Learning':

So must th'Imagination from the sense  
Be misinformed, while out affections cast  
False shapes, and formes on their intelligence,  
And to keepe out true intromissions thence,

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<sup>31</sup>Robert Southey, *Select Works of the British Poets from Chaucer to Jonson* (London: Longmans, 1831), p. 912.

<sup>32</sup>Southey, p. 515.

Abstracts the imagination or distasts,  
With images preoccupately plac'd.<sup>33</sup>

The association Greville makes between 'Imagination' and 'false shapes' suggests a concern about imperfect instruction: if we are 'misinformed' by the 'sense', we do not necessarily learn the lesson an author or artist intends. As a contemporary late Elizabethan point of comparison, we see a similar wariness in Book Two of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590): at the top of the House of Alma, standing for the human body, Phantastes, the personification of the imagination, sits, in a fly-blown chamber, 'disappointed all with in | With sondry colours, in the which were writ | Infinite shapes of thinges dispersed thin'.<sup>34</sup> In Spenser's cognitive phantasmagoria, the imagination is uncontrolled; the flies in Phantastes's chamber, standing for 'idle Thoughts and Fantasies', block perception just as Greville's 'images preoccupately plac'd' do; Spenser's insect thoughts 'encombred all Mens Ears and Eyes', just as Greville's 'images' hinder 'true intromissions'.

Intromission theory – the idea that an object projects an image of itself which we take in through the eye, and thus perceive the object – was initiated by the Greek atomists, modified by Aristotle, and developed by medieval Arabic scientists.<sup>35</sup> Its antithesis is extromission or emission: the idea that the eyes themselves emit rays which strike objects and create perceived images. Intromission theory postulated that one should base perception on a concrete physical object rather than on an image which 'abstracts' – in the Latin etymological sense of *abstrahere* – 'drag away' or 'divert' – 'the imagination'. Greville likely first encountered the idea during his time at Jesus College, Cambridge, in the late 1560s: early modern student notebooks, for example, tell us that some aspects of Aristotelian science – including, apparently optical theory – were posited as 'right', well into the seventeenth century.<sup>36</sup> We could align Greville's use of intromission theory with the kind of empiricism developed by Greville's contemporary at court, Francis Bacon, along with Bacon's famous

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<sup>33</sup>'Of Humane Learning', I, 157 ([stanza 12](#)).

<sup>34</sup>Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, rev. edn (Harlow: Pearson, 2007), p. 244 (II. ix. 50).

<sup>35</sup>For an overview, see, for example, David C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 58–59.

<sup>36</sup>For one example of how early modern Cambridge students were taught optical theory, see *The Palfrey Notebook*, ed. C. J. Cook (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011). George Palfrey was a student at Sidney Sussex College in the early 1620s, and this notebook details his reading and studies; relevant here are the notes on p. 174 ('De visu').

characterisation of the ‘distempers of learning’ in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605): one of these, of course, is ‘fantastical’ learning arising from excessive imagination. For Bacon, too, the ‘mind of man’ is ‘far from the Nature of a cleare and equall glass, wherein the beames of things should reflect according to their true incidence’ (intromission theory again); instead, Bacon argues, the human mind ‘is rather like an inchaunted glasse, full of superstition and Imposture, if it be not deliuered and reduced’.<sup>37</sup> Greville makes a similar point in ‘Of Humane Learning’, which also aligns the faculty of imagination with mirrors, where the picture presented can dangerously vary:

Knowledges next organ is *Imagination*;  
 A glasse, wherein the obiect of our Sense  
 Ought to respect true height, or declination,  
 For vnderstandings cleares intelligence:  
 But this power also hath her variation,  
 Fixed in some, in some with difference.<sup>38</sup>

Greville’s plays are full of glasses – mirrors – and, like Bacon’s, these are ambiguous and untrustworthy. The association here between sensory perception and the potential *mis*-perception caused by imagination’s power to blur, as a mirror which might distort, can be read against the ‘fatal~~l~~ mirro~~ur~~ of transgression’ Greville describes in the *Caelica* sequence. This time, it has the power to show ‘man as fruit of his degeneration, | The ~~error~~’s errours ugly infinite impression’: in these poems, mirrors are figured either as flatteringly false or as painfully accurate.<sup>39</sup> And in the plays, similarly, the one ‘good’ character in *Alaham*, Caelica, speaks of ‘the flattering glasse of Power’,<sup>40</sup> and the fourth Chorus ‘Of People’ describes political subjects – the people themselves – also as ‘the glasse of Power’. This may not be a good thing, given that the people are elsewhere represented – and, indeed, characterise

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<sup>37</sup>See Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, ed. Michael Kiernan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 24. For the relationship between Greville and Bacon, especially in relation to ‘Of Humane Learning’, see Boutcher, “‘Rationall Knowledges’”, pp. 23–37.

<sup>38</sup>‘Of Humane Learning’, I, 156 (stanza 10). [these lines appear to be the remainder of the stanza quoted; why in the note?]  ill, so shadowed with self-application | As makes her pictures still too foule, or faire; | Not like the life in lineament, or ayre.’

<sup>39</sup>Greville, *Caelica*, in *Poems and Dramas*, ed. Bullough, I, 73–153; here, I, 144 (Sonnet 99, lines 7–9)–37, 7–9. These lines in *Caelica* prompted Richard Waswo’s influential monograph, *The Fatal Mirror: Themes and Techniques in Fulke Greville’s Poetry* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1972).

<sup>40</sup>*Alaham*, II, 201 (IV. 3. 83).

themselves – as fickle and suggestible. In *Mustapha*, the human face (as reflective, or not, of the human mind) is a ‘glass’: early in the play, the scheming Rossa tries to persuade Solyman of his son Mustapha’s duplicity, to hasten the filicide: ‘This is the glasse which Father looks not in; | The Workman hides, the instruments discover.’<sup>41</sup> She misrepresents the open, exemplary Mustapha here as an artificer – ‘The Workman’ – while she and her confederates are the ‘instruments’ – the scientific searchers-out of truth. Generally, in Greville’s writing, mirrors are only to be trusted when they present harsh, uncomfortable truths, as when Hala the advisor, turning on Alaham to make him realise the enormity of his crimes, commands him to ‘Looke in thy Conscience, that vnflattering glasse’.<sup>42</sup> This idea of didacticism, how plays can instruct through example and reflection, particularly in relation to politics, is central to Greville’s poetics, and explains, perhaps, why Lamb said that *Alaham* and *Mustapha* ‘might with more propriety have been termed political treatises, than plays’.<sup>43</sup>

Related to this idea of theory and application is the life-as-school-of-hard-knocks argument (already a cliché by the 1590s), which we see echoed in *Mustapha* when the bully Solyman argues that ‘Experience wounded is the Schoole, | Where man learnes piercing wisdom out of smart’.<sup>44</sup> This idea of ‘experience wounded’ is the essence of tragic action: the learning of ‘piercing wisdom out of smart’ is how tragedy imparts its lessons. Greville carefully differentiates his intention from what he calls ‘ancient’ – classical – dramatists who provoke ‘horror or murmur against divine providence’ and ‘modern’ playwrights who ‘point out God’s revenging aspect upon every particular sin’. He defines his ‘purpose’ – the tracing out of bad governors – as an ‘abstract end’: on these terms, then, showing bad government for ‘the practice of life’ is an ‘abstract’ endeavour. While this might seem paradoxical – how can an explicitly practical purpose also be an ‘abstract’ one? – we need to keep a close eye on how Greville uses both terms to get a clearer sense of what he means.

Greville’s use of the term ‘abstract’ wavers too much to be tidily pinned down: we have already seen in ‘Of Humane Learning’ the concern that either the ‘imagination’ or the ‘sense’ (depending on how one reads Greville’s difficult syntax) ‘[a]bstracts the imagination or distasts, | With images preoccupately plac’d’. ‘Abstracts’, used as a verb here, problematically removes us from lived reality into the beguiling yet deluded world of the

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<sup>41</sup>*Mustapha*, II, 69 (I. 2. 116–17).

<sup>42</sup>*Alaham*, II, 210 (V. 3. 7).

<sup>43</sup>See n. 29, above.

<sup>44</sup>*Mustapha*, II, 86 (II. 2. 163–64).

fantasy. At other points, Greville uses the word to convey a kind of dry scholarly remoteness (the same kind of freezing-over with intellect attributed to him by Lamb), in a specific and to some extent satirised, academic context that is central to the argument which drives ‘Of Humane Learning’, namely, that applied knowledge is always superior:

... for the most part those *Professors* are,  
So melted, and transported into these;  
And with the Abstract swallowed up so farre  
As they lose trafficke, comfort, vse, and ease.<sup>45</sup>

The ‘*Professors*’ are only pulled up out of their pit of abstraction – and their remoteness from ‘vse’ – by a proposed ‘reformation’ of learning in the next stanza:

Then must the reformation of them be,  
By carrying on the vigor of them all,  
Through each profession of Humanity,  
Military, *and* mysteries Mechanicall:  
Whereby their abstract formes yet atomis’d,  
May be embodied; and by doing pris’d.<sup>46</sup>

Embodiment of the abstract is the only way it gains usefulness; only ‘*doing*’ makes the ‘abstract formes’ able to be ‘pris’d’.

In ‘Of Humane Learning’, abstraction tends to be criticised, but occasionally Greville uses the term more neutrally, in a second, more metaphysical sense: in the same poem, **for example**, an ‘eternall, infinite’ ‘*Deity*’ is characterised, **for inst**, **who is as** ‘all-seeing, | Euen to the abstract essences of Creatures’.<sup>47</sup> In the first chorus ‘Of Good Spirits’ in *Alaham*, the spirits contrast their own ‘abstract formes, and substance bodillesse’ with ‘Man’, ‘a crazed soule, vnfix’d ... toss’d ... here, and there’.<sup>48</sup> Optical intromission is again invoked as the spirits ‘[i]mage by glaunces into him our glories, their distresse’: this time, the ‘abstract formes’ perceive themselves as superior, looking at man – imaging ‘by glaunces’ – to see their own ‘glories’ by contrast. Here, the abstraction – whether ‘abstract essences of Creatures’ or the ‘abstract formes’ of the ‘good spirits’ – is a worthy object of contemplation, but in a second verse treatise, ‘An Inquisition upon Fame and Honour’, Greville pushes this

<sup>45</sup> ‘Of Humane Learning’, I, 183 (stanza 119).

<sup>46</sup> ‘Of Humane Learning’, I, 184 (stanza 120).

<sup>47</sup> ‘Of Humane Learning’, I, 185 (stanza 23).

<sup>48</sup> *Alaham*, II, 157 (Chorus Primus, lines 21–26).

idea further, so that an abstraction is not just profitably to be contemplated, but leads to action through – and here is a complication or inconsistency in Greville’s thinking, based on what we have already seen – the ‘image’ formed in the ‘braine’, which was so pernicious and untrustworthy in ‘Of Humane Learning’:

Yet doth there rise from abstract contemplation,  
A gilt or painted image, in the braine,  
Of humane vertues, *Fames* disestimation,  
Which, like an Art, our nature so restraines.<sup>49</sup>

What Greville entertains here is the idea that ‘abstract contemplation’ can lead to a ‘painted image’ ‘in the braine’ which then prompts action. Far from an antithesis of abstraction and action, the one leads to the other. This is why, in the *Dedication*, the ‘large, yet uniform, disposition’ of Sidney is presented through analogy with ‘the abstract name of goodness’, and although Greville calls ‘her nature hard to imitate’, he nonetheless presents the example as a challenge; ‘ill followed’ but still *worth* following.<sup>50</sup> In the *Dedication*, we see a similar *combination* of theoretical sophistication and practical application, then, which was central to Greville’s sense of moral value: this idea is continually emphasised when, for instance, he characterises Sidney’s friend, the French reformer, Hubert Languet, as ‘learned *usque ad miraculum* [to a miraculous extent], wise by the conjunction of practice in the world with that well-grounded theory of books’.<sup>51</sup> He develops this idea in his picture of Sidney, who is called (admittedly on his death-bed) an ‘exact image of quiet and action’, the *vita activa* conjoined with the *contemplativa*.<sup>52</sup> Although for Greville all intellectual work was best deployed for practical ends, his starting point is often to describe ‘images’ and abstractions which should then be acted on. We are back to the idea of ‘short precepts’ as the way to learn.

Thinking finally of Greville’s interest in the right reader for his plays, I will end with a simile from *Mustapha*’s first Chorus of ‘Basha’s or Caddies’ – advisors and officials – in which the role of ‘Counsellors’ is compared with the function of marginalia:

But where the Better rules the Greater part,  
And reason onely is the Princes Art;  
There, as in Margents of great volum’d Bookes,

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<sup>49</sup> ‘Inquisition’, H, 197 (Stanza 20).

<sup>50</sup> *Dedication*, p. 24.

<sup>51</sup> *Dedication*, p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> *Dedication*, p. 89.

The little notes, whereon the Reader lookes,  
Oft aide his overpressed memory,  
Vnto the Authors sense where he would be:  
So doe true Counsellors assist good Kings,  
And helpe their Greatnesse on, with little things.<sup>53</sup>

A case could be made for Greville's plays as fitting within the 'mirror for princes' tradition, as 'little notes' intended to teach how to govern. And marginalia help us to understand a main text; they are different from the abridgment or epitome that may *prevent* the reader from encountering the main text for him- or her-self. Greville's plays do not make it easy for the reader to exercise judgement and understanding; they are not 'plain and perfect' in their expression. I would argue, though, that Greville saw his reader as engaged in an active, demanding process, extracting meaning rather than being offered it unambiguously by the author, and through this arduous dialectical process becoming better equipped to apply the plays' didactic lessons for 'the practice of life'.

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<sup>53</sup> *Mustapha*, II, 76–77 (Chorus *Tertius Primus*, lines 109–16).