

CF.S1

## Introduction

CF.P6 The cover image of this book is a detail from *The School of Athens*. More than five hundred years ago, Raphael was invited by Pope Julius II to paint this fresco in the Vatican. The famous painting, devoted to the subject of philosophy, shows Plato and Aristotle in the middle at the top of the stairs, surrounded by several other philosophers. At the base of the steps, lower than Plato's right foot, a somewhat gloomy character is caught in the act of writing. The huge (26 feet by 9 feet) preparatory cartoon for the fresco has been preserved, which is quite rare. Usually these cartoons for Renaissance frescoes were destroyed during the creative process, because they were used to prick the outlines of the figures with pins and dabbed with a bag of charcoal powder to transfer the image to the wall. At the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana in Milan, after a four-year restoration, this sketch of *The School of Athens* is on display in a special vitrine with nonreflective glass, treated as an object of art that is equally valuable as the fresco in the Vatican.

CF.P7 Even a cursory comparison suffices to notice that in the preparatory sketch there is no sign of the gloomy figure at the base of the steps who is believed to be modelled after Michelangelo and to represent Heraclitus, the melancholic, 'weeping' pre-Socratic philosopher. Raphael originally did not plan to paint this writing figure. It appears to have been just an afterthought (Povoledo 2019). Raphael seems to have painted Heraclitus on the spur of the moment, as a late addition. The irony of presenting Heraclitus in the act of writing is that only fragments of his work have survived. We know Heraclitus best for his emphasis on the constant flux of the universe, according to the motto 'you cannot step twice into the same river'. If the figure represents Heraclitus, it is indeed fitting that he is pictured with his quill touching the paper in midstream, in the middle of his 'work in progress', in the flow, so to speak. It is an appropriate emblem for this book on the genesis of written works, as it captures a moment that is a most fleeting subject of research: the moment someone is in mid-thought, using writing tools to give shape to their ideas.

CF.P8 Genetic criticism gives more than just a penny for such thoughts. As part of the Humanities' research into aspects of human society and culture, it invests in the study of precisely that flux: the dynamics of the writing process, which is inevitably also a cognitive process. Since this topic is fleeting by definition, it cannot be captured without losing its most essential quality. But the flux does leave traces. This literary alluvium—notes, drafts, marginalia—allows us to some extent to reconstruct the flow of writing as well as the obstacles in that process.

## xvi INTRODUCTION

- CF.P9 The flux is of course just an image, but it is a metaphor we live and think by, to paraphrase Lakoff and Johnson (1980). The appreciation of this textual fluidity is certainly not general or universal. An oft-quoted passage that illustrates a different attitude towards manuscripts is a footnote in Charles Lamb's essay 'Oxford at the Vacation', in which he expresses his consternation after seeing Milton's manuscripts:
- CF.P10 There is something to me repugnant, at any time, in written hand. The text never seems determinate. Print settles it. I had thought of the *Lycidas* as of a full-grown beauty — as springing up with all its parts absolute — till, in evil hour, I was shown the original written copy of it, together with the other minor poems of its author, in the Library of Trinity, kept like some treasure to be proud of. I wish they had thrown them in the Cam, or sent them, after the latter cantos of Spenser, into the Irish Channel. How it staggered me to see the fine things in their ore! interlined, corrected! as if their words were mortal, alterable, displaceable at pleasure! as if they might have been otherwise, and just as good! as if inspirations were made up of parts, and those fluctuating, successive, indifferent! I will never go into the work shop of any great artist again, nor desire a sight of his picture, till it is fairly off the easel; no, not if Raphael were to be alive again, and painting another Galatea. (Lamb 1820, 369)
- CF.P11 Under the pseudonym 'Elia', Lamb wrote his essay 'from my rooms facing the Bodleian' on 5 August 1820 and it was published in the *London Magazine* that same month. According to Lamb, the idea that literature might be manufactured ('made up of parts') and that its elements are 'fluctuating' and 'alterable' was so distressing that he would prefer the manuscripts to be thrown into the River Cam or the Irish Sea. It is rather painful that Lamb chooses the Irish Sea, since that is precisely where Edward King drowned, Milton's Cambridge schoolmate to whom this poem, *Lycidas*, is dedicated.
- CF.P12 The manuscript is still extant and is kept at Trinity College, Cambridge. It is part of a notebook containing several drafts of what the title page calls Milton's 'juvenile poems'.<sup>1</sup> Following a draft of *Comus*, the untitled first draft of *Lycidas* opens on a left-hand page (fol. 16v; page 30). After fourteen lines, it was aborted and Milton started again on the facing page (Trinity College Library MS R. 3. 4, fol. 17r; page 31).<sup>2</sup> Between the title and the first line, he later added the line 'In this Monodie the author bewails a learned friend [Milton's Cambridge schoolmate Edward King] unfortunatly drownd in his passage from Chester on the Irish Seas 1637.'
- CF.P13 Towards the end of the page, the manuscript shows the traces of an exciting moment of creative undoing. Milton thoroughly revised the passage where the

<sup>1</sup> <https://mss-cat.trin.cam.ac.uk/manuscripts/uv/view.php?n=R.3.4&n=R.3.4#?c=0&m=0&s=0&c v=3&xywh=2309%2C612%2C2633%2C1700>.

<sup>2</sup> For an early analysis of Milton's revisions, see Stone 1968.

### **End of Excerpt**

This is the accepted manuscript version of the article. In keeping with the publisher's self-archiving policy<sup>1</sup>, up to 25% of this version is permitted in an institutional repository. The final version is available online from Oxford University Press.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://academic.oup.com/pages/authoring/books/author-reuse-and-self-archiving>