

## The New Poet and the Old: Edmund Spenser and Thomas Churchyard

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On 17 November 1593 the adventurer and spy Anthony Standen wrote a letter from the court at Windsor to his fellow intelligencer Anthony Bacon. The letter contained a mixture of news concerning disagreements over the estate of the recently deceased Christopher Carleill, the enthusiastic involvement of the earl of Essex in that year's Accession Day tilts, and Standen's positive reception among the ladies of the chamber.<sup>1</sup> Bacon had hoped that his extensive intelligence work in France during the 1580s would secure him some reward from his uncle Lord Burghley, the Lord Treasurer, though soon found that any such support would not be forthcoming.<sup>2</sup> In order to illustrate the plight and response of someone finding themselves in a similar situation, Standen added the following as a postscript to his letter:

I sende you Sir here fower of Churchyardes chylde[n] whiche he hatche in collor  
after he coulede not obteyne of one a thinge her Majestie had granted hym which  
\verses/ came to her handes

Madame.

You byd *your* Tresorer on a tyme

To gyve me reason for my ryme

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<sup>1</sup> London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 649, fols. 388-9. Bacon's relationship with Standen is discussed at length in Will Tosh, *Male Friendship and Testimonies of Love in Shakespeare's England* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), ch. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Alan Stewart, 'Anthony Bacon', *ODNB*.

But synce that tyme and that season  
 He gave me nether ryme nor reason.<sup>3</sup>

The complaint being referred to here pertains to a royal pension of 18*d* per day awarded to the soldier-author Thomas Churchyard. This was to be paid from Michaelmas 1592 though it appears to have been revoked or withheld for over a year, apparently at Burghley's behest. Churchyard continued to complain in print during the mid-1590s about his withdrawn reward and penurious state until a new annuity grant of 20*d* per day was finally secured in July 1597.<sup>4</sup> How Standen came to encounter or record these four ("fower") lines of verse is unclear. Standen's correspondence from the early 1590s, now held at Lambeth Palace Library, indicates that he remained close to the court and in continued communication with Essex, Burghley, and both Anthony Bacon and his brother Francis. He may therefore have known first-hand of Churchyard's petition, had it been presented to Elizabeth during her stay at Windsor in the latter half of 1593.<sup>5</sup> This petition in verse may also have been the sort of matter learnt about from Churchyard's friend and former comrade-in-arms Sir Roger Williams, with whom Standen reports in the same letter of being "together de Camerada where wee discourse of all, and where I wysshe you sometymes to here Syr Roger in his Satyricall humor."<sup>6</sup> We know from a satirical letter written to Williams by the gentleman-adventurer John Roberts in early 1585 that the old soldier certainly enjoyed catty in-jokes

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<sup>3</sup> MS 649, fol. 389r.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Woodcock, *Thomas Churchyard: Pen, Sword and Ego* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 242.

<sup>5</sup> E.K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923), 4: 108.

<sup>6</sup> MS 649, fol. 388r.

about his fighting contemporaries—Churchyard included.<sup>7</sup> Standen’s reference to Churchyard’s “chyl dren” also sounds like a knowing, mocking allusion to the poet’s lifelong habit of using alliterative appellative titles for his works, such as *Churchyardes Chippes* or *Churchyards Challenge*.

These verses were, for some time, taken out of their original context and ascribed to Edmund Spenser so as to be read as a complaint about the apparent non-payment of the £50 annuity he was granted in February 1591. They were marshalled as further evidence of Burghley’s supposed hostility to Spenser that complemented comments made in the 1596 *Faerie Queene* about the Lord Treasurer’s disapproving “rugged forehead” (IV.i.1) and “a mighty Peres displeasure” (VI.xii.41).<sup>8</sup> John Manningham included a variant version of the verses from the Standen letter in his diary in 1602 maintaining that

when hir Majestie had given order that Spenser should have a reward for his poems, but Spenser could have nothing, he presented hir with these verses:

It pleased your Grace upon a tyme  
To graunt me reason for my ryme,  
But from that tyme untill this season  
I heard of neither ryme nor reason.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> F.P. Wilson, “An Ironicall Letter,” *Modern Language Review* 15 (1920), 79-82.

<sup>8</sup> Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton, et al (Harlow: Longman, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> John Manningham, *Diary*, ed. John Bruce (London, 1868), p. 43.

Thomas Fuller embellished the anecdote in his 1662 *Worthies of England*, claiming that Spenser presented the petition in a small piece of paper given to the Queen during her progress and offering yet another version of the lines:

I was promis'd on a time,  
To have reason for my rhyme;  
From that time unto this season,  
I receivd' nor rhyme nor reason.<sup>10</sup>

Alexander Grosart's biography of Spenser repeated the version of the story and poem found in Manningham, and dismissed a suggested ascription of these lines to Churchyard.<sup>11</sup> More recent scholarship has, however, corrected the attribution for these verses and furnished confirmation that Spenser's pension was indeed paid.<sup>12</sup> Once it is clear whose complaint these verses articulate, a Spenserian's attention may well turn from their real author and his situation. One's inclination may be to dwell more upon the better-known poet and the place of the pension anecdote within the larger narrative of Spenser's complex relationship with the Elizabethan court during the 1590s. What follows here offers a short review of why

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas Fuller, *The History of the Worthies of England* (London, 1662), sig. Eee4v.

<sup>11</sup> Edmund Spenser, ed., *The Complete Works*, ed. Alexander Grosart, 9 vols. (London, 1882-4), 1: 163-4.

<sup>12</sup> Herbert Berry and E.K. Tillings, "Spenser's Pension," *Review of English Studies* 11 (1960), 254-9; Roger Geimer, "Spenser's Rhyme or Churchyard's Reason: Evidence of Churchyard's First Pension," *Review of English Studies* 20 (1969), 306-9; Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 235-6.

Spenserians might tarry a little longer with Thomas Churchyard. It examines why greater critical attention to Churchyard provides insight into the kinds of strategies Spenser himself used to articulate his literary identity, and into how the older figure responded to, and positioned himself in relation to, the younger poet.

Born c.1529, Churchyard first went to court during Henry VIII's reign and had actively served five different monarchs by the time of his death in 1604. He first saw the wars in 1543 in his mid-teens in the retinue of Henry Howard, earl of Surrey, and after several extended periods as a soldier was still in arms in 1587 when he accompanied the earl of Leicester to the Low Countries to fight the Spanish. He was a veteran of most of the principal Tudor theatres of war and fought extensively in France, the Low Countries, Scotland, and Ireland. Churchyard also had a fifty-three-year career as a published author, during which time he produced over fifty works in a variety of forms and genres, and he may well have started writing poetry as early as the 1540s.

Spenser and Churchyard are most usually paired in relation to their being the only two Elizabethan poets granted a royal pension, although it should be noted that the latter was rewarded for "certain good causes" performed for the state rather than for his literary activities.<sup>13</sup> Although they are sometimes grouped together in discussions of Elizabethan authors who lived or served in Ireland, there was no overlap between the periods each spent there. (Churchyard was in Ireland in 1551 and from 1575-6.) There were also only relatively small windows of time during which both would have been in London and/ or at court in the very late 1580s and early to mid-1590s. One such moment is recorded obliquely in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* when the poem's speaker finds a figure representing Churchyard—"old Palemon," discussed further below—among the company of shepherd-

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<sup>13</sup> Woodcock, *Churchyard*, p. 241.

poets piping at Cynthia's court.<sup>14</sup> There was relatively little overlap too in the kinds of literary genres and forms with which both writers worked, although Spenser certainly knew and drew upon Churchyard's work. As Scott Lucas has shown, Spenser used the older poet's first published poem, *Davy Dycars Dreame* (1551), in the "September" eclogue of *The Shepheardes Calender*.<sup>15</sup> Both writers were also engaged in different ways in the ongoing project of Elizabethan myth-making, with Churchyard's involvement in royal progresses during the 1570s helping to establish part of the representational vocabulary of mythopoeic figures for the queen that Spenser draws upon in *The Faerie Queene*. Both writers composed printed responses to the large earthquake of 6 April 1580. But while Churchyard's pamphlet, *A warning for the wise*, composed within two days of the earthquake, eschewed any talk of causation in favour of a virtual tour of London and restaged the critical moment at various locations across the city, the event really only served as a pretext for the far more wide-ranging self-promotional excursions seen in the exchange of letters between Spenser and Gabriel Harvey published several months later.<sup>16</sup> Spenser and Churchyard are rarely paired in the writings or observations of their contemporaries save for their presence together in the list of those "most passionate among us to bewaile and bemoane the perplexities of Love" found amongst other, seemingly incongruous, collocations in Francis Meres's 1598 *Palladis Tamia*.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Edmund Spenser, *The Shorter Poems*, ed. Richard A. McCabe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999), p. 356.

<sup>15</sup> Scott C. Lucas, "Diggon Davie and Davy Dicar: Edmund Spenser, Thomas Churchyard, and the Poetics of Public Protest," *Spenser Studies* 16 (2002), 151-65.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Churchyard, *A warning for the wise* (London, 1580).

<sup>17</sup> Francis Meres, *Palladis Tamia, or, The Wits Commonwealth* (London, 1598), sig. Ee2v.

Churchyard may be of particular interest to Spenserians, however, in providing another, earlier example of an author whose works offer continued, conscious encouragement to recognize, reflect on, and reward the figure behind the texts we have before us, and that make continued gestures to a reality beyond the author's writings. This is what Richard McCabe—writing of Spenser—calls auto-referential, rather than autobiographical, writing, whereby the author makes it impossible to read his work without some reference to his life.<sup>18</sup> Auto-referential writing takes many different forms in the works of Spenser and Churchyard, including paratextual commentaries (dedications, prefaces, marginalia), apostrophic personal observations, and—especially for the latter—extended personal anecdotes. Throughout Churchyard's works we are encouraged to discern the presence of the man “whose resteles hande, is writing every hower,” as he describes himself in the *Mirror for Magistrates*-like tragedy he composes about the Ricardian favourite Sir Simon Burley.<sup>19</sup> Whether there is any accuracy in the figure or scenario to which our attention is drawn at such auto-referential moments is, as McCabe maintains, of less importance than the issue of why such directions are given at all. Indeed, we can learn much about authors employing such gestures through exploring why they should seem so concerned with adopting a particular narratorial stance or returning to a certain kind of extra-textual story. We find our attention being drawn back to a just such an extra-textual story in Spenser's early, formative works, *The Shepheardes Calender* and the 1580 *Letters*. Both of these publications cultivate a sense of their secondary, deictic nature through their allusive directions to practices and activities beyond

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<sup>18</sup> Richard A. McCabe, “Authorial Self-Presentation,” in McCabe, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 463.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Churchyard, *Churchyardes Chippes* (London, 1575), sig. F7r.

the page, almost as if the printed text was the by-product of an implied narrative concerning the invention and production of that text.

It is perhaps not accidental that both Spenser and Churchyard launched their literary careers by reworking and re-appropriating one of the seminal classical models of auto-referentiality, Ovid's *Tristia*. The elegy with which the *Tristia* opens, in which Ovid addresses the very text he writes and sends back to Rome from exile in Tomis, serves as the *locus classicus* for the kinds of auto-referential gestures found throughout both of the early modern poets' works.<sup>20</sup> As I examine at greater length in my biography of Churchyard, although the author's writing had appeared in print for over two decades by 1572, the publication that year of his *Thre First Bookes of Ovids De Tristibus* marked a significant turning point for his literary career, both in terms of the book's length and quality, and in how he now presented himself publicly as a poet.<sup>21</sup> Churchyard's translation of the *Tristia* was the first publication that he directed toward a named patron, Sir Christopher Hatton, and his first to include a dedication commenting upon the process of writing and presenting the work in hand. Churchyard's source-text and subject provided him with a model of how to draw a reader's attention to the story of the author figure's composition and transmission of that same text. Both here and elsewhere in the translation, Ovid's metatextual poetry starts to echo the sentiments of Churchyard's paratextual commentaries and dedication to Hatton as the author appropriates the standpoint of the exiled poet in order to vocalize his own perceived marginality at court. The opening poem of *The Shepheardes Calender* begins with an allusion

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<sup>20</sup> Ovid, *Tristia*, trans. A.L. Wheeler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 2-13.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Churchyard, *The Thre First Bookes of Ovids De Tristibus* (London, 1572); Woodcock, *Churchyard*, pp. 155-60.



back to the epilogue to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* ("Goe little booke") but there is a debt here too to the first poem of Ovid's *Tristia*, and a more complex, palimpsestic relationship to both the well-known medieval source and its earlier point of origin.<sup>22</sup> Spenser's speaker is rather more coy and guarded than Ovid's as he still maintains his faux-rustic identity as a "shepherds swaine" should anyone ask the poem who it was that brought it forth. Nevertheless, this is not just another instance of the *Calender* combining classical and medieval sources and traditions; it is an example of how Spenser, like Churchyard, appears to be invested in the projection or dramatization of what Foucault famously termed the "author function"—of the sort of figure that is clearly cast as an originator of a text.<sup>23</sup>

The implications of such an observation extend beyond simple identification of further sources or analogues for Spenser's artistry. Thinking about Churchyard and Spenser in concert, and identifying their shared recourse to this Ovidian device at the launch—perhaps relaunch, in Churchyard's case—of their literary careers, may encourage one to

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<sup>22</sup> Spenser, *Shorter Poems*, p. 24. Alexandra Gillespie discusses the complex antecedents of the opening paratexts to *The Shepherdes Calender* in "Unknowe, unknow, Vncovthe, uncouth: From Chaucer and Gower to Spenser and Milton," in Andrew King and Matthew Woodcock, eds., *Medieval Into Renaissance: Essays for Helen Cooper* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2016), pp. 15-33. See also J.S.P. Tatlock, "The Epilog of Chaucer's *Troilus*," *Modern Philology* 18 (1921), 625-59; and R. J. Schoeck, "Go Little Book: A Conceit from Chaucer to William Meredith," *Notes & Queries* 197 (1952), 370-2. Sophie Buckingham has recently examined the early modern reception of the *Tristia* in her doctoral project at the University of East Anglia, 'A Poetics of Exile: The Reception of Ovid's *Tristia* in Tudor England'.

<sup>23</sup> Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?," in David Lodge and Nigel Wood, eds., *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* (Harlow: Longman, 2008), pp. 281-93.

reconsider some of the traditionally espoused views about early modern career models or paradigms for authorship. It has long been a critical commonplace to discuss how the pastoral genre was traditionally considered by generations of poets to constitute the most effective template for launching a literary career, following the well-known programmatic Virgilian *rota*, and to position Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar* within that trajectory.<sup>24</sup> However, even though its ostensible context is a departure or displacement, Ovid's *Tristia* offered an alternative, no less assertive or empowering model of a text with which to signal one's "arrival" as an author, not only through its sustained attention to its composition and reception but through its insistent advertisement of the author's continued presence and the attendant notion that the book and its transmission acts as a surrogate for the author.

Whereas in *The Shepherd's Calendar* attention is drawn beyond the text to the unnamed "new Poete," in another of Churchyard's works prepared in the early 1570s

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<sup>24</sup> See Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton, and the Literary System* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 67-82; Thomas K. Hubbard, *The Pipes of Pan: Intertextuality and Literary Filiation in the Pastoral Tradition from Theocritus to Milton* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998); Colin Burrow, "Spenser's Genres," in McCabe, ed., *Spenser Handbook*, pp. 406-9; Svirthe Pugh, "Reinventing the Wheel: Spenser's 'Virgilian Career,'" in Paul J. Hecht and J.B. Lethbridge, eds., *Spenser in the Moment* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015), pp. 3-34. Patrick Cheney, *Marlowe's Counterfeit Profession: Ovid, Spenser, Counter-Nationhood* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), pp. 41, 44-7, proposes an alternative, anti-Virgilian career model adopted by Christopher Marlowe to challenge Spenser, although this too—mapped onto different phases of Ovid's life—still treats the *Tristia* in relation to the later phases of an author's literary career.

alongside the *Tristia* translation, the miscellany *Churchyardes Chippes* (1575), the eponymous author really seems to cultivate, and advert readers towards, the figure of himself as the old poet. In one poem of the collection, the semi-autobiographical “Tragicall Discourse of the unhappy mans life,” Churchyard imagines himself laid out dying upon a bier, looking back over his military service, and bidding his peers farewell before bequeathing his soul to God and his books to his friends. Aged in his early forties and in relatively decent health at this point, the author nevertheless offers us the self-portrait of a broken, decayed figure:

In warrs and woe, my yeers aer waested clean  
 What should I see, if lordly lief I led  
 I loek in glas, and finde my cheeks so lean  
 That evry owre, I do but wishe mee ded  
 Now back bends downe, and forwards faulls the hed  
 And hollow eyes, in wrinckled brow doth shrowd.

The lipps waxe cold, and loeks both pael and thin  
 The teeth fawlls out, as nutts forsoek the shaell  
 The baer bald head, but shoes whear hear hath bin  
 The lively joynts, waxe weery stiffe and staell  
 The reddy tongue, now folters in his taell  
 The wearishe face, and tawny collour shoes  
 The corraeg quails, as strength decayes and goes.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Churchyard, *Chippes*, sig. I4r.

Elsewhere in the same volume Churchyard includes “A Farewell when I went to studie,” written during the 1560s, in which he is already bidding farewell to the court and to the world, and claiming that “I must be to my grave/ For this is but, a May game mixt with woe,/ A borrowd roulme, where wee our Pagents play.”<sup>26</sup>

Spenser himself responded to this figure of the old poet found in Churchyard’s works. He seems to have recalled in particular an image evoked in one of Churchyard’s anti-curial complaints, “Verses that were given to a moste mightie personage,” from the 1580 miscellany *A pleasaunte Laborinth called Churchyardes Chance*, in which the older poet despairs “Yong witts hath ronned, old Churchyard out of breath.”<sup>27</sup> A decade later the old poet is situated alongside figures representing Sir Walter Raleigh, Arthur Gorges, Samuel Daniel, and others as they pipe to win the affection and favour of their queen Cynthia in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, although his long service in that role has taken its toll:

And there is old Palemon free from spight,  
Whose carefull pipe may make the hearer rew:  
Yet he himselfe may rewed be more right,  
That sung so long untill quite hoarse he grew.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Churchyard, *Chippes*, sig. C1v. Histrionic threats to depart from either the court or world were a staple feature of Churchyard’s poetry throughout much of his life: Woodcock, *Churchyard*, pp. 120-1, 126-30, 240-1.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Churchyard, *A pleasaunte Laborinth called Churchyardes Chance* (London, 1580), sig. I1r.

<sup>28</sup> Edmund Spenser, *The Shorter Poems*, ed. Richard A. McCabe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999), p. 356.

The attention drawn to this figure's "carefull" (i.e. sorrowful or care-ridden) artistry that elicits pity and lament from its audience seems a fair assessment of Churchyard's preoccupation with complaint, and when Spenser also notices how Palemon himself might be pitied or "rewed" the sly pun on "rude" suggests that this shepherd's piping was judged of an unpolished, unskilful nature. Far from taking offence at this characterisation, soon after *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* was published Churchyard responded to his cameo appearance in the poem when writing in *A Musicall Consort of Heavenly harmonie [...] called Churchyards Charitie* of how the unfruitful, "cold" climate for poets at court had caused his hoarseness.<sup>29</sup> The following year Churchyard appears to use Spenser's vignette of "old Palemon" to complement his own subsequent complaints about his limited successes at court, a place that he describes as "The platform where all Poets thrive,/ Save one whose voice is hoarse they say."<sup>30</sup> Within these interactive allusions there is an implied sense of connection and continuity between both poets' disdainful meditations upon the place of poetry and learned speech within the competitive world of court. Although it is tempting to suggest that Spenser could be one of the "yong witts" with whom Churchyard compared himself negatively in 1580, by the early 1590s the new poet actually voices similar sentiments to those of the old when he has Colin Clout explain why he wishes to depart from Cynthia's court and return home.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas Churchyard, *A Musicall Consort of Heavenly harmonie [...] called Churchyards Charitie* (London, 1595), sig. A8r.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Churchyard, *A Pleasant Discourse of Court and Wars* (London, 1596), sig. B1r.

<sup>31</sup> See Spenser, *Shorter Poems*, pp. 363-5.

Literary interaction between Churchyard and Spenser can also be seen in a poem that appears in the older poet's longest literary miscellany *Churchyards Challenge* (1593).

Located prominently at the start of *Challenge* and assuming the function of a dedicatory poem, is what Churchyard presents as "A new kinde of a Sonnet":

In writing long, and reading works of warre,  
 That *Homer* wrote and *Virgils* verse did show:  
 My muse me led in overweening farre,  
 When to their Stiles my pen presumde to goe.  
*Ovid* himselfe durst not have vaunted so,  
 Nor *Petrarke* grave with *Homer* would compare:  
*Dawnt* durst not think his sence so hye did flow,  
 As *Virgils* works that yet much honord are.  
 Thus each man sawe his judgement hye or low,  
 And would not strive or seeke to make a jarre:  
 Or wrastle where they have an overthrow.  
 So I that finde the weakenes of my bow,  
 Will shoot no shaft beyond my length I troe:  
 For reason learnes and wisdome makes me know.  
 Whose strength is best and who doth make or marre:  
 A little Lamp may not compare with Starre.  
 A feeble head where no great gifts doo grow:  
 Yeelds unto skill, whose knowledge makes smal shew.  
 Then gentle world I sweetly thee beseech:  
 Call *Spenser* now the spirit of learned speech.

Churchyards good will<sup>32</sup>

In a collection in which less than half of the contents were new compositions, and that was prefaced with a bibliography of Churchyard's published and manuscript works dating back over forty years, the old poet's inclusion of what he declares to be a "new" kind of sonnet clearly stands out. It would be fair to say that this twenty-line poem in iambic pentameter did not represent a new dawn in the history of English versification or sonnet writing. There is no obvious subsequent imitator of this idiosyncratic rhyme scheme with its irregular variations in couplets and quatrains of *a* and *b* rhymes that concludes for emphasis in a couplet using a third rhyming sound.<sup>33</sup> Despite its titular advertisement of being something "new," metrically the poem hearkens back to some of the more experimental verse forms found in Tottel's *Miscellany* (1557), a collection in which Churchyard's poetry had appeared many years before.<sup>34</sup> The only real novelty concerning the new sonnet derives from its subject matter, and

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<sup>32</sup> Thomas Churchyard, *Churchyards Challenge* (London, 1593), sig. \*\*v.

<sup>33</sup> Steven May and William A. Ringler, Jr, eds., *Elizabethan Poetry: A Bibliography and First-Line Index of English Verse 1559-1603*, 3 vols. (London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2004), 3: 2172.

<sup>34</sup> Woodcock, *Churchyard*, pp. 35-42. In terms of rhyme schemes found in Tottel, Churchyard's new sonnet comes closest to resembling that of the Petrarchan blazon "Lyke the Phenix a birde most rare in sight": *Tottel's Miscellany: Songs and Sonnets of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, Sir Thomas Wyatt and Others*, ed. Amanda Holton and Tom McFaul (London: Penguin, 2011), pp. 243-4 (no. 211). See also J. Christopher Warner, *The Making and Marketing of Tottel's Miscellany, 1557: Songs and Sonnets in the Summer of the Martyrs' Fires* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 127-8.

its relatively early demonstration of the construction of Spenser's reputation among his literary peers following publication of *The Faerie Queene*. Churchyard's contribution to Spenser's reception history is not associated in any way with Spenser's distinctive metrical forms; the older poet was probably never going to be an early adopter of the Spenserian stanza or the sonnet form employed in the *Amoretti*.<sup>35</sup> Churchyard does, however, effect something of a transition between the old poet and new here. Opening with yet another vignette of the author as seasoned writer and reader, the poem recounts how Churchyard's literary forebears—Ovid, Petrarch, Dante—knew better than to compare their works with those of Homer and Virgil. Churchyard then makes a similarly deferential gesture, not to the poets of the past but to Spenser. In doing so he recognizes a sense of his own inferiority (“A little Lamp may not compare with Starre”) whilst also indicating subtly that he is making way for the poet who should now be called “the spirit of learned speech.” Never one for wholly selling himself short, following the analogy drawn in the poem, Churchyard still places himself into the same literary rank as Ovid, Petrarch, and Dante, and also seems to imply that Spenser will be taking up where he had left off or was otherwise now inadequate. Through

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<sup>35</sup> R. M. Cummings, *Edmund Spenser: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1971), p. 69, includes Churchyard's new sonnet as evidence of one of the earliest poetic responses to Spenser to appear in print independently of the commendatory verses accompanying *The Faerie Queene*. Cummings mistakenly reads “world” as “works” in the penultimate line, sourcing the poem from Samuel Egerton Brydges's *Censura Literaria* (1805-9), where the line appears correctly. The poem as it appears in Cummings's volume concludes pleasingly, if erroneously on a note that again echoes Ovid's opening address in the *Tristia* to the poem before him, thus: “Then gentle works I sweetly thee beseech:/ Call *Spenser* now the spirit of learned speech.”



signing off the poem with “Churchyards good will” he offers his own form of authorisation and endorsement of the poet introduced in the final line: Spenser.

We may not now regularly connect Spenser and Churchyard, nor speak of them in the same breath except in relation to the award—frustrated or otherwise—of a royal pension to an Elizabethan poet, though this is not for want of the older poet trying to establish these connections himself. As noted above—and as I demonstrate at length in my biography of Churchyard—the older poet never tired of making these kinds of auto-referential gestures back to himself and the contexts of his writings. And Churchyard should be of interest to Spenserians for anticipating many of the self-promotional techniques and gestures found in the works of his younger fellow author, including (as suggested) his use of the Ovidian authorial model from the *Tristia*. Churchyard’s later publications also provide valuable illustrations of Spenser’s early critical reception amongst his literary contemporaries. One of the things that makes Churchyard’s place in Spenser’s reception history particularly noteworthy is the way in which he seizes the opportunity to position himself in relation to the new poet—and to some extent in imaginative dialogue with the new poet—for self-promotional purposes. Although few of Churchyard’s literary peers and successors chose to imitate the form of his “new kinde of a Sonnet,” there would certainly be many who endorsed and echoed its commendatory sentiments.