Echo and Meaning on Early Modern English Stages

ANDERSON, Susan L. <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7081-3160>

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Introduction: Echo and Meaning

The most of us which now doe write,

Old-Writers Eccho's are. (John Owen)

Early modern echo is an extraordinarily capacious category whose functions spread across practical, theoretical, aesthetic and moral realms. Echo effects on stage enhance the pleasure of the listener even as echo, on a broader level, operates as a creative and structural principle within literary works. Echo is imitative, but it can also modify the meaning of the sounds it imitates. It can be musical, and indeed can be considered as part of the modus operandi of music, an art form based on pleasurable sonic repetitions.[1] Echo highlights the arbitrary sonic properties of language, and can uncover alternative meaning within words already sounded. It can make what is unsaid, said, and can even stand in for the process of historical recovery. It exceeds temporal boundaries by coming *after the end*, and thus, like historical inquiry, it is inherently belated.

This book uses the trope of echo to explore the ways in which sound and music in performance were meaningful in early modern culture even if we can no longer hear them. For twenty-first century auditors, understanding early modern music often entails imaginatively reconstructing from sparse evidence "what it actually sounded like". But "what it actually sounded like" is itself a proposition that requires dismantling,[2] because sound is no more outside discourse than language is. We cannot recreate original performance conditions, firstly on the pedantic grounds that absolute identicality is impossible. As Benjamin notes, "even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (Benjamin [1936] 2007, 220). Secondly,

our own presence within such performance conditions is entirely anachronistic: we cannot detach our context from the text we are listening to (Burstyn, 1997).[3] Furthermore, our conceptualisation of the nature of music, the way we describe it, and the effects we expect from it have a material effect on our response to it. For instance, Dolscheid et al. (2013) have shown that concepts of music embedded in language do verifiably influence the response of listeners. Thus, since the early modern *understanding* of music was different to our own, the early modern *experience* of music must, too, have differed considerably. Despite these seemingly insurmountable barriers, however, the concept of echo allows us to retrieve the possibility of analysis. Reading the textual traces left by these soundings as echoic means recognising that they both imitate and modify their unrecoverable originating moments. These traces include notated music where it exists, to be sure, but also lyrics, commentary and other archival material which does not *record* music and sound so much as *reflect* it.

This book attends to these echoes by focusing on iterations of the figure of Echo in early modern descriptions of theatrical drama, progress entertainments, and masques. As well as appearing as a personification, echo rebounds through these texts in forms of adaptation, translation, and invention, which all create echoic effects, particularly in relation to the way that meaning operates intertextually.[4] Writers of the texts discussed here all draw on pre-existing stories, including that of Echo herself, as well as other tropes and characters to combine and recombine in the manner of a kaleidoscope, creating infinite variations made up of the same recognisable materials.[5] The technique enables creators of entertainments to balance the joint aesthetic priorities of tradition and novelty,[6] as well as similarly conflicting criteria such as variety and restraint, and conformity and exceptionality, values which are constantly in tension

with each other in early modern culture. Echo is the fundamental mechanism by which these values are negotiated and through which meaning is created in early modern cultural artefacts.

Furthermore, the conditions of the source materials consulted by this book offer parallels with echo in several ways. The instability and multiple statuses of the texts I discuss present echoic relations to lost originals, whether that original is considered to be a one-off performance event or an ur-text. For example, texts describing Elizabethan progress entertainments are often assembled from fragmentary poems, songs, dramatic vignettes and partial descriptions to create a piecemeal narrative of events that took place over several days, or were planned and did not take place. Even where entertainment texts are organised by an authorial hand, as became de rigueur in the court masque of the seventeenth century, such accounts show clear partiality. For example, they tend not to focus on music and rarely provide notation.[7] (In some cases songs were printed separately, published in adapted form for private use.) Even playtexts, which might seem to offer a stable key to multiple performances of the same play soon recede into plurality and indeterminacy under scrutiny. For instance, one of the plays discussed in Chapter 3, *Cynthia's Revels*, exists in at least two significantly distinct textual forms which may or may not reflect evidence of court and public performances and the differences between them. *The Duchess of Malfi*, discussed in Chapter 5, contains song lyrics disavowed by Webster which may have been heard at some performances and not others. Rather than imposing an in/out model of textual authenticity, however, I prefer a paradigm of degrees of likeness (Kirwan 2015, chap. 3). Performance sounds reverberate, then, in plural iterative forms across time, their textual traces recapitulating and distorting the sounds, words, and actions heard and seen at a particular event or events. The idea of distortion is not to be understood negatively here. Rather, it is a creative

and distinctive feature of the development of these texts, and akin to the reworking of the myth of Echo found in the texts themselves.

Nevertheless, before these echoes dissipate so far as to become unintelligible, there remains within them a level of coherence which can offer a degree of concrete evidence about the past. This book attends to this evidence for the purpose of understanding how music and sound interacted with other elements of performance, and what kinds of meaning they conveyed, even where they are not archivally preserved. The book uncovers a variety of ways in which individuals engaged with music and sound in the period, and shows that they were significant elements in creating a public self for a range of different kinds of people. The book is organised by genre and, in the next chapter, starts by examining echo's presence in progress entertainments staged for Queen Elizabeth, focusing in particular on the entertainments at Elvetham and Kenilworth. These events, although unusual in terms of their scale, show how performances become exemplary and therefore subject to repetition. In particular, the use of echo as a performance device at Kenilworth is repeated or referenced in several later entertainments. The sounds heard at prior events are thus revisited, revised, and re-heard in different locations and contexts, developing an acoustics of courtly entertainments in which the signs of musical sophistication become political assertions.

Chapter 3 examines the portrayal and use of echo in drama more broadly, surveying a range of texts to demonstrate the ways that form and content overlap. It then focuses at length on the 1601 Quarto of Ben Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels* in which Echo appears as a character on stage. In revivifying her, this play turns Ovid's version of the myth into a tool of moral, as opposed to aesthetic, expression. In doing so, Jonson repeatedly invokes neoplatonic notions of

music's spiritual and ethical functions, and this chapter explores Jonson's transformations of these ideas.

Chapter 4 discusses the use of echo and repetition in the Jacobean court masque. Jonson's texts are again a focus, as both the *Masques of Blackness* and *of Beauty* include echo effects which, in Ferrabosco's songs, convey moral meaning through their aural aesthetic. It is Thomas Campion, however, who exploits echoic effects most clearly in his *Lord Hay's Masque* and *Lords' Masque*. Most importantly, this chapter reads the masque as a dance genre, and as such, one in which music is indivisibly linked to repetitive physical movement. Through understanding dance both as a form of aestheticised repetition within itself, and as a somatic repetition of music, this chapter shows that the genre's focus on mingling fictional and social personae was promoted through song and enacted through dance.

The concluding chapter explores the continued troping of repetition in two very different texts. *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*'s opening references to echo demonstrate the way this work seeks to recapitulate and capitalise on poetic, literary and family precedent. Although *Urania* suggests the continuation of an echoic tradition, this chapter also offers a counterpoint in the disillusioned echo heard in *The Duchess of Malfi*, a play whose scepticism tends towards the deconstructive effects that echo can have. *Malfi's* mournful echo scene and repeated engagement with meaningless sound suggest that in the absence of accurate listening, echo becomes a meaningless cacophony. Ultimately, echo's malleability is also instability.

The texts discussed in this book originate in a literary-historical period whose identity and artistic output has consistently been mediated through the idea of repetition: the very idea of "The Renaissance" itself is quite obviously a trope of repetition, but the concept of the "Early

Modern" also depends upon a sense that ideas and figures common in the modern era are recognisably linked to those that have gone before. Echo is a way of accounting for the mixture of sameness and difference that characterises engagement with the traces of the literary, visual, sonic and musical past. Thus, a consideration of echoic sound on early modern stages feeds into broader questions about the extent to which it is possible to recover and reconsider moments from the past, the nature of the relationship between the archive and experience, and the importance of loss in historical understanding.

That history is engendered by loss is made clear in Stephen Greenblatt's famous opening to his account of the cultural production of works of art, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, where he confesses to have been motivated by "the desire to speak with the dead" (Greenblatt 1988, 1). Greenblatt's acknowledgment that "all I could hear was my own voice" concedes some of the limitations of the enterprise, but it also implicitly recognises the aural quality of the object of his desire at the same time. Similar anxieties repeatedly surface in discussions of voice, authenticity, and the relationship between original and copy in the modern and postmodern eras.

Even more acutely than speech, music's inherent evanescence makes it a particularly stark example of this kind of loss. Music is a temporal art form: the passage of time is, in some sense, its medium. Each sounding, therefore, constitutes a unique and unrecoverable event. Rather than mourning this loss as absolute, however, it proves more productive to consider loss as a process which is ongoing rather than a dead/alive binary. In this way, echo helps to bridge the gap between what is preserved in the archive, and what Taylor (2003) refers to as the repertoire. Taylor disputes the idea that embodied practices like dance or ritual are ephemeral and that only archivable material endures. This is most usefully developed in her concept of the scenario: "Instead of privileging *texts* and *narratives*, we could also look to scenarios as

meaning-making paradigms that structure social environments, behaviors, and potential outcomes" (Taylor 2003, 28). Echo is a scenario of repetition which is itself obsessively repeated, rewritten and restaged in the period. Echo always already contains within it its implied originary instance which is, paradoxically, no longer present. It denotes what has already begun and is in the process of being lost, but is by definition what yet remains. Using echo as a historical methodology means acknowledging both that we are in some sense participating in these repetitions and that we are always in medias res. Nevertheless, a historical account must itself begin somewhere. The rest of this chapter establishes some of the mechanisms for meaning that this figure invokes through examining a range of early modern poetic manifestations of echo.

Poetic echo

In his discussion of poetic refrain, John Hollander outlines a referential spectrum "with one pole at what used to be called the 'purely musical'" (for which he gives the example "fa-la-la"), and the other pole being

one of optimum density of reference, in which each return accrued new meaning, not merely because of its relation to the preceding strophe (their glossing of each other), but as a function of the history of its previous occurrences in the poem. (Hollander 1985, 77)

Thus echo as refrain occupies the overlap between sound and sense, drawing attention to poetry's exploitation of arbitrary yet serendipitous sonic coincidences. The poetic echo is thus a specific form of anadiplosis, or reduplication. In discussing German baroque poets' own prescriptions for a successful echo poem, Johnson (1990) notes that "simple repetitions are acceptable, but good echoes are either repetitions in which the sense or the syntactical function is

changed, or when the final words are split up and only a part is repeated" (193). Good, or pleasurable echo, therefore, reveals unintended meaning, the paradoxical content of what is said covertly through not being said overtly (Hollander 1981, 27). Echo is a mischievous principle of deforming, manipulating and recasting the words of a speaker through partiality of repetition.

In the context of the obsessively punning linguistic culture of Elizabethan poetry, the alteration of semantic function is hardly unusual, but it is worth pointing out the extra emphasis that echo's repetitions place on homonyms and double meanings. Such a mode of expression is particularly appropriate to the highly politicised context of courtly entertainment where evading meaning is as useful as invoking it. The echo draws attention to the malleability of meaning, and the ingenuity that can take advantage of this instability. In performance, this emphasises the literary artifice of the words being heard; in the text, it highlights the aural and temporal performativity of the speech being represented on the page.

Echo's emphatic wittiness makes it especially appropriate to the courtly setting in which it first emerged as a dramatic trope in English. As Ringler notes, the earliest English example of an Echo appearing in performance is the one created by Gascoigne for the 1575 Kenilworth entertainment (1962, 402).[8] This instance of Echo, discussed at length in Chapter 2, establishes the figure through a question and answer structure. The answers to the questions, in accordance with the nature of the echo device, are contained in the final one, two or three syllables of each line, which are repeated by Echo. For example, at one point, the Savage asks "But wherefore doe they so rejoyce? | is it for King or Queene?", to which Echo, inevitably, replies "Queene" (Goldring et al. 2014, 3:604). Binnie observes that "the voice of an echo giving aid or answers to the speakers became a dramatic convention" in the Jacobean period (Binnie 1980, 60n), though it had fallen out of popularity by the time it was revived by Milton for a song in his 1637 masque at

Ludlow castle (usually known as *Comus*).[9] This tradition, such as it is, takes place within an already established set of paradigms. Chronologically prior versions of the figure are simultaneously present in the re-use of the familiar story and scenario. This telescoping of time is characteristic of the way in which we as later readers encounter such chronologically disparate texts. Furthermore, temporal distortion is also a notable feature of the way in which Echo's story (in common with the others in the work) is told in the *Metamorphoses* and it is Ovid's version of Echo's story that most of the echoes in this book recapitulate.

Echoing Ovid: Golding, T.H., and Caxton

Both of Ovid's sixteenth century translators, Golding and T.H.,[10] emphasise in their paratexts the importance of understanding the links between the interwoven stories that make up the epic poem. Golding, for example, in his address to the reader asserts that "whoso means to understand them right | Must have a care as well to know the thing that went before" (2002, lines 210-11). Even T.H., who only translates an excerpt of Ovid, suggests (somewhat ironically) "His tales do join in such a goodly wise, | That one doth hang upon another's end" (1560, lines 221-2). The looping structure of Ovid's epic introduces characters into the timeline of a narrative, only to immediately veer onto their backstory before cycling back round to resume the tale again. Echo's story is a corollary to the story of Narcissus; the account of her origin is a parenthetical aside before she becomes yet another of Narcissus's spurned would-be lovers.[11] T.H.'s title – *The Fable of Ovid Treating of Narcissus* – makes clear whom his version is "about" in the crudest sense. After hearing of Narcissus's birth and childhood, the moment Echo first espies him triggers in the narrative a retrospective excursus explaining how she lost her power over her own voice.[12] The narrative then returns to the point where Echo (still embodied, though voiceless), pursues Narcissus. Being rejected by Narcissus initiates Echo's bodily decay, and, in Golding,

this is narrated in the present continuous, right up until the "real" present shared between the narrative voice and the reader:

> […]   Through restless cark and care
>
> Her body pines to skin and bone, and waxeth wondrous bare.
>
> The blood doth vanish into air from out of all her veins,
>
> And nought is left but voice and bones. The voice yet still remains;
>
> Her bones, they say, were turned to stones. From thence she, lurking still
>
> In woods, will never show her head in field nor yet on hill.
>
> Yet is she heard of every man; it is her only sound,
>
> And nothing else that doth remain alive above the ground. (Golding 2002, lines 491-500)

Despite being a denizen of the distant mythical past, "yet is" her voice heard even now, and, rather like Tantalus, her suffering and wasting takes place in a continual never-ending present.[13] Immediately after updating the reader on Echo's current status, the narrative reverts to the mythical past to describe Narcissus's encounter with his own reflection. Once he has become ensnared in infatuation, Echo returns to the scene to repeat his laments, and subsequently the laments of other nymphs after Narcissus has finally expired.[14]

Echo is a particularly apt figure for this folding together of timelines. Her repetitiousness offers a way of holding on to the past, repeating a part of something that is lost, and in this sense, the figure interferes with continuity and temporal order. Such non-logical sequencing helps to obscure the linear relationship between original and copy, sound and echo. This works on a

symbolic level, too, as Narcissus's transmutation into a flower fulfils his desire to be free of his own body, and thus can be read as a recasting of Echo's bodily loss, narrated prior to this passage. In terms of the poem's "plot", Echo cannot be the originator of this action, so both Narcissus and Echo replicate each other's magical loss of bodily substance in a kind of echo with no original note.

Repetition and parallelism work throughout Golding's translation of the entire work, not just in this particular storyline. The characteristically "Renaissance" habit of reworking and developing Classical sources is, in the broadest sense, itself a kind of echo. Looking at the more obvious repeated motifs of the *Metamorphoses*, we find that Narcissus's experience of unrequited love forms a textual parallel with the many other frustrated lovers of the poem, including Echo herself, and the other suitors of all genders that Narcissus has rejected. In a series of decreasing circles of desire, Narcissus is unattainable first to "a number both of men and maids" (T.H., line 13), then to Echo specifically, and then to himself.

The frank sexuality of the poem makes no bones about the object of the lovers' desire throughout. Reciprocation is expressed through the body, emphasising the role of the body as a necessary component of erotic love. Thus Golding specifies, before her rejection, "This Echo was a body then and not an only voice" (line 447). Unfortunately for Narcissus, the body is "the thing" which he must "wish away" (line 590),[15] and, in a radical disjunction between self and body, he wishes that "I for a while might from my body part" (line 588).

The erotic prospect of bodily contact is part of the humour of Golding's use of Echo's voice. When Narcissus tries to locate his lost hunting companions, she answers his question "Is there anybody nigh?" (line 474) with "I", at once an affirmative and a declaration of subjectivity.

Her repetition of his reply "Let us join" (line 483) translates its meaning as explicitly sexual, and this is the moment where she finally shows herself and attempts to touch him, prompting his instant retreat. Echo's embodiment is crucial for her participation in sexual exchange; denied sexual exchange, she loses her body.

Narcissus's lack of desire can be recast as a desire for lack – for the absence of physical contact, to avoid being touched. His rejection of the body and withdrawal into absence is the trigger for Echo's gradual bodily diminution. First she is reduced to "skin and bone" (line 494), then "voice and bones" (line 496), and finally voice alone. Although the possessive in "it is her only sound" (line 499) suggests that this voice belongs to her in some way, it is nevertheless not her own. The nymph is reduced to such an extent that her presence becomes homeopathic in quantity, and in quality a catalyst – she becomes a process, not a person.

As pointed out by Gibbs and Ruiz, the body is denigrated by Golding in his address to the reader, [16] where he avows "this lump of flesh and bones, this body, is not we" ("To the Reader", line 101). Yet the poem has a more ambivalent relationship to the body than the dismissal of it as a "vile and stinking pelf" might suggest ("To the Reader", line 106). Drawing an equivalence between the pleasures of the body and mind, Golding asserts the value of poetry, claiming

For, as the body hath his joy in pleasant smells and sights,

Even so in knowledge and in arts the mind as much delights. ("To the Reader", lines 135-6)

The personification of the body as a separate entity from the mind here curiously prefigures Narcissus's dilemma. That art reflects the self is clear from Golding's description of his poem as a "crystal glass" which reflects "foul images" if it is presented with "foul visages" in

the 1567 Epistle (lines 559-60). This idea, rendered thus in the Epistle for the Earl of Leicester, is presented somewhat less tactfully in the address "To the Reader" when the poem is called "a mirror for thyself thine own estate to see" (line 82). Ultimately, Golding, like other writers (especially Jonson as we shall see in chapter 3), places a moral responsibility upon the reader to seek out the meaning of art and to respond accordingly, urging the reader to bring "a staid head and judgement" to the task ("To the Reader", line 140), in order to avoid Narcissus's error.

This argument is not restricted to poetry, of course. The writer of *The Praise of Musicke* (a work sometimes attributed to John Case) uses the same tactic, claiming that "the fault is not in musicke, which of it selfe is good: but in the corrupt nature and evill disposition of light persons, which of themselves are prone to wantonnes" ([Case?] 1586, 58).[17] Thomas Wright also ascribes responsibility for the results of musical affect to the moral quality of the listener: "Let a good and a godly man heare musicke, and he will lift up his heart to heaven: let a bad man heare the same, and hee will convert it to lust" (quoted in Lindley, 2006, 29). Although Golding's references to reflective surfaces prefigure the story of Narcissus as a cautionary tale, and seem part of a generally visual bias in the poem, he nevertheless describes poetry as "Not more delightful to the ear than fruitful to the mind" ("To the Reader", line 184), suggesting the necessity of aural attentiveness. Golding's repetitiousness on the topic emphasises the reader's obligation to actively look and listen for hidden meaning.[18]

Such didactic purposefulness is reflected quantitatively in T.H.'s rendering, where the story itself is only a fifth of the length of the verse "moralisation" that follows it. And if stories should be recycled, so too, it seems, are interpretive suggestions. T.H.'s appeals to authority are entirely grounded in the idea that he is reporting the interpretations of others. Only after he has paid due diligence to prior authorities such as Bersuire and Boccaccio, does he sheepishly put

forward "What I conceive", whilst making a rather garbled promise to maintain "the reck of wisdom's sober port" and the judgement of "the learnèd" (lines 568-9). Again, such deference is thoroughly typical, and not necessarily to be taken at face value. Nevertheless, it is evidence of a discourse that is explicitly constructed as repetition, not novelty. What is concealed by this rhetoric is the selectivity of repetition, and the transformational effect that partiality has upon meaning. Whilst these translations and exegeses concentrate on Narcissus, the partiality of Echo and the incompleteness of her repetitions invite scrutiny and reveal the potential for novelty.

Differences between the translations express significantly different approaches to the story and to its larger implications. For instance, Caxton's 1480 prose version, itself based on a French translation (Brown and Taylor 2013, 4), suggests that, when Narcissus hears Echo repeating his words, he "herd never voys that so moche plesed hym" (Caxton [1480] 1968).[19] This is unsurprising, as at this point she is effectively an aural mirror, repeating his own words. This prefigures Narcissus's preference for himself, since it is only when he sees her (and thus recognises her difference) that he is repelled. In T.H.'s version, by contrast, it is Echo who "never heard | A sound that liked her half so well to answer afterward" (lines 53-4). She is not only attracted by Narcissus's looks, but both sound and content of his speech, and it is *her* preferences T.H. draws our attention to.

Comparing these versions of the story forces us to consider the question of whose voice is whose. That is, whether Echo's repetitions are her voice or Narcissus's, whether they are the same or different, and what constitutes difference. Echo interferes with the subjectivity implied in the speaking "I". It is not a simple correspondence of voice and identity. In Golding's rendering of this moment, the authorial voice also complicates matters by seeming to explain the

words Echo would have liked to have said. In Seres's 1567 edition of Golding the section is printed thus:

> He still persistes and wondring much what kinde of thing it was
>
> From which that answering voyce by turne so duely seemde to passe,
>
> Said: Let us joyne. She (by hir will desirous to have said
>
> In fayth with none more willingly at any time or stead)
>
> Said: Let us joyne.[20] And standing somewhat in hir owne conceit,
>
> Upon these wordes she left the Wood. (Golding 1567, Fiiii[v])

Golding seems to be stating that Echo would have liked to have expressed her willingness to join with Narcissus. Madeleine Forey's edition makes this interpretation clear by placing the line within quotation marks, making "In faith with none more willingly at any time or stead" reported speech (Golding 2002, bk 3, line 482). This makes Golding's narrator the reporter of Echo's thoughts – Echo cannot put her sentiments into words, but a narrator can do just that. In this reading, Echo's words are only utterable by someone who is not Echo. Having said this, Forey also suggests the alternative of reading "said" as a synonym for "converse", and notes that this produces a closer translation of Ovid (Golding 2002, 476n). In Hill's Latin edition, the line, "nullique libentius umquam | responsura sono, 'coeamus,' rettulit Echo" is given as "and Echo, who would never respond | more willingly to any sound, replied" (Ovid 1985, bk 3, lines 386-7). In these different versions of this moment, our attention is drawn to the question of who is originating and who is responding to sound and sentiment, and to the fact that the originator of one may not be that of the other. That is, speaking first does not confer control over the meaning

of the words uttered. Echo's repetition, seemingly a merely mechanical effect, is an opportunity for intervention.

Furthermore, different early modern editions of Golding's translation vary in their rendering of this moment. The different printings of the text give different versions of the word that Echo repeats – the word that either Narcissus or Echo herself prefer to hear or repeat. The earliest editions, printed by Willyam Seres in 1565 and 1567 have Narcissus saying "let us joyne" (Fiiii^v) which, as noted above, has its latent sexualised meaning brought forward by Echo's repetition. In Seres's 1575 edition, however, we find the less obviously suggestive "let us meet". This revision stands in editions produced by a range of printers during the rest of the sixteenth century (John Windet and Thomas Judson, 1584; Robert Waldegrave, 1587; John Danter, 1593), before W. White's 1603 edition reverts to "joyne". Most intriguingly, Thomas Purfoot's 1612 printing gives Narcissus the phrase "let us joyne", but has Echo respond "let us meet". One's first response (in the grand tradition of scholarly denigration of blockheaded typesetters and error-prone printers) is to wonder how such an obvious mistake could slip through – and it probably is indeed an error. Although the mismatch thwarts the reader's expectations, perhaps this is no bad thing. Having heard echo dutifully repeat Narcissus's phrase in previous editions of what is an exceptionally well-known work, the obvious clang here might present a refreshing and comic surprise. At any rate, Echo's speech, seemingly so rigidly controlled, is in fact pliable. Who is responsible for directing it both within the myth itself and in the mechanics of retelling her story is not fixed. And most importantly of all, Echo foregrounds the obligation on the reader to actively seek out, or indeed create, meaning from the words that are repeated.

Echo and pastoral: Sidney, Longus, and Day

Whilst Echo's repetitions of the words of others is her last toehold on the corporeal world, in poetic terms, masculine speakers co-opt the voice of Echo to preserve their own subjectivity. In the *Old Arcadia*, echo is invoked twice, but not as a character in her own right. Instead, she is a force available to male poetic voices. For instance, Pas invokes the aid of echo to outperform another shepherd-poet in his praise of his love-object:

So oft these woods have heard me "Cosma" cry,

That after death to heav'n in woods' resound,

With echo's help, shall "Cosma, Cosma" fly. (Sidney 1973, 145) [21]

Alternative manuscript versions of this part of the work offer altered echoes of the particular word that the poet repeats, supplying either "Hyppa" or "happy" for "Cosma".[22] For both "Hyppa" and "Cosma", ostensibly the name of the muse lives on after the poet's oblivion, but in fact it is the poet's voice speaking her name that maintains subjectivity. In the "happy" version of these lines, the identity of the beloved is dispensed with altogether in favour of the condition of the poet. Rather than hypothesising about the order in which these variants might have emerged,[23] I prefer to argue that their simultaneous echoing presence in itself is a telling merger that shows us that the beloved's name operates as a cipher for the state of mind of the speaker. Furthermore, an apparent fantasy of immortality is in fact a fantasy of annihilation (Goldberg 1986). Bodies decay whilst sound traces remain, concretising the word at the expense of the body that speaks it. Thus, the general Platonic deprecation of the body noted above also permeates the *Old Arcadia* ("A shop of shame, a book where blots be rife | This body is" (147)).

Echo is also used as a poetic device in an eclogue which only appears in the *Old Arcadia*, not the revised *New Arcadia*. Near the end of book 1, the authorial caricature, Philisides, agrees

to perform "an eclogue betwixt himself and the echo, framing his voice so in those desert places as what words he would have the echo reply unto, those would he sing higher than the rest" (160). This is a rather odd-sounding principle for a song setting, but the text invites us to imagine an ideal performance in which such rendering is desirable or even possible. Furthermore, this design seems to misrepresent the way an echo works in nature.[24] By asserting that the singer is deliberately selecting particular words for Echo to repeat, Sidney's text shows that is not concerned with creating a credible representation of a genuine echo, nor with revealing ostensibly unintended meaning. Instead it emphasises the way echo verse showcases skill and artifice. Notwithstanding the fact that Sidney's verse does not do a particularly good job of conforming to the quantitative metrical pattern he has set himself (and indeed supplies),[25] the poem is at least *meant* to be a performance of verbal dexterity that aligns the aural and semantic properties of speech. The poem's subject matter is standard – the folly and pain of love, and the impossibility of satisfying desire. Its "failure" in terms of its metrical scheme might charitably be seen as representing the over-ambition of music and poetry more generally, and of the bathos lurking behind the hyperbole of courtly pastoral. In this way, the eclogue can be read as a knowing failure whose artifice and attempt is still pleasurable, since the prescriptions for performance are entirely imaginary.

The strictness of the echo form imposes repetition emphasising the arbitrary nature of the relationship between sound and sense, and therefore sign and signified. The clearest example of this is that when Philisides declares the words that have "served more to me bless", Echo replies "Less", revealing the ironically opposing meaning contained within the statement itself. Worked through to its conclusion, this approach collapses meaning – the words contain their opposite, removing the Derridean difference that underpins meaning.[26] This is not destructive, however,

but additive as echo proliferates meaning. The variants listed by Robertson in her edition of

Sidney testify to the radical instability of the text, to the necessity of making our own meaning of

these echoes. Different, potentially contradictory, meanings, are simultaneously present.

In the broadest sense, then, the entire work itself is a paradigmatic example of the way

early modern sources survive in multiple, equally valid forms, including the major differences

between the *Old Arcadia* and the *New Arcadia* (Davis 2011). Furthermore, as noted above, the

use of echoic techniques such as repetition and redoubling of homonyms and homophones is

endemic in the poetry of the period, and this is just as true of Sidney's work even if it does not

use end rhymes in the way that Golding does.[27] For instance, when a disguised prince complains

about disguise, he opines that

But yet, alas! O but yet, alas! our haps be but hard haps,

Which must frame contempt to the fittest purchase of honour.

Well may a pastor plain, but alas his plaints be not esteemed (84).

The density of repetitiousness in these three lines is characteristic of much of the work (in

its prose as well as its poetry), as is the irony of complaining that disguise alters the way that

poetic statements are interpreted. This implies an epistemology where contextual cues such as

the assumed identity of the speaker are inseparable from verbal meaning. Such meaning operates

echoically, varying according to context within sentences, within the text, and between

characters. Words, phonemes and rhythms echo intratextually within the work itself. As

Hollander (1985) notes, repetitions are further circuits of potential referentiality: "refrains *are*,

and *have*, memories – of their prior strophes or stretches of text, of their own preoccurrences,

and of their own genealogies in earlier texts as well" (77). Such a formulation is one thing within

a single text, but in broader terms points towards a potentially endless recursiveness that seems to require omniscience in its reader. But like the non-omniscient reader, who may not share or recognise the memories encoded, Echo has only partial recall, and thus acknowledges as already lost the "preoccurrences" that gave rise to it.

Furthermore, Echo has the potential to obscure referentiality by obliterating or covering over certain sounds, whether by accident or selection. Although Ovid's version of the story resounds more loudly in the archive, there is an alternative origin story in Longus's Greek prose romance *Daphnis and Chloe* (2nd-3rd century CE). Here, Echo is the subject of an inset tale, told by Daphnis during his courtship of Chloe. Daphnis presents Echo as a talented musician, described in Angel Day's 1587 translation as having "a most excellent knowledge and cunning in all kinde of songs and instruments" (Day 1587, M2^v).[28] Because of "hir unmatchable skill", Echo is a favoured companion of the Muses, and thus has no interest in "the company of men […] but being a virgin by disposition, sought fully and wholy how to preserve the same" (M2^v). Echo's abjuration of men seems to be an affront, especially in the context of the direction of Daphnis and Chloe's incipient relationship. Life in an all-female enclave is not imagined as unpleasant *for women*,[29] since Echo is well-suited to it and happy to remain. But for the male teller of the story it cannot stand. As Schlapbach (2015) points out, all three of Daphnis's inset tales feature a gifted female musician being subjugated to male control, creating a pattern designed to prepare Chloe for patriarchal marriage (80). In Echo's case, Pan's anger at her refusal of his sexual advances leads him to take revenge in a particularly gruesome manner:

he inraged against her all the heat of men and shepheards of the country where she was, that like woolves and mad dogges they tare the poore *Nymph* peece-meale in their furie, […] throwing the gobbets here and there. (M2^v)

Somewhat startlingly, even as she is being dismembered, Echo is "yet singing hir songs", inspiring a kind of feminised resistance:

the very earth it selfe favored hir musike, and [receaved] immediatly hir soundes in sorte as evermore agreeing to this day with the Muses in accorde, the same tune that is plaied she recordeth, the same song that by any voice is delivered, she repeateth. The earth thus retaining the former condicion of the *Nymph* while she lived, when either gods, or men, or instruments of musike, or beasts, or Pan himselfe soundeth his sweet Syrinx over the hollow rocks, it counterfeiteth evermore the same notes. (M2$^{\mathrm{v}}$-M3$^{\mathrm{r}}$)

The story emphasises Pan's lack of understanding of what has transpired, noting how the god often follows the sound Echo makes, not because he thinks he might find her, but because he remains ignorant of what causes it.

Although the specifics of this version of Echo are not restaged in the early modern period, there are ways in which Longus's story reverberates. Sidney, for example, consistently and deliberately harks back to the conventions of Greek prose romance (Moore 2015, 302), and tropes and techniques from this echo story recur across the genres and texts discussed in this book. Longus's story includes a description of a festival to honour Pan. This setup is echoed in the pastoral conceits that regularly introduce and facilitate the progress entertainments discussed in Chapter 2. The textual description of performed music, mime and song parallels the way Elizabethan entertainment texts describe performances. Moore (2015) points out that Angel Day uses this opportunity in his translation to interpolate "an idealised and obedient rural populace" into the story (305). This invented and politically convenient populace would be read back into reality by progress entertainment texts.

Jacobean masques and their textual descriptions also take advantage of this slippage between imitation and reality, as we shall see in Chapter 4. This slippage is prefigured in Longus, in the moment where Daphnis pretends to be Pan playing the Syrinx. As Schlapbach (2015) points out, "if the music is mimetic, by contrast, the act itself of performing it is completely real" (92). She is right, therefore, to claim that in Longus's text, Daphnis "does not just communicate tales of male predominance, he performs male predominance by the very act of being the one talking and playing music" (93). But in Elizabethan and Jacobean echoes of this Greek story, the differing context offers an opportunity to hear Echo as a mode of facilitating feminised resistance to male predominance. This is especially notable in the Bisham entertainment, discussed in Chapter 2, and in Wroth's *Urania*, as we shall see in Chapter 5, though in *The Duchess of Malfi* the possibility is pessimistically rejected (also discussed in Chapter 5).

The myth of echo is a personification which both explains a natural phenomenon, and also attaches symbolic significance to it. In this way, nature and artifice become so closely entwined as to be indistinguishable. By this I mean that our understanding of the natural phenomenon of echo is conceptualised in language that inevitably invokes the symbolic properties of Echo. Examining the recruitment of the "natural" to reify social and cultural states is central to this book's political reading of the cultures of courtly performance in early modern England. In relation to Longus, Schlapbach suggests that stories are "projected onto the natural environment", making cultural patterns seem natural and inevitable; reciprocally, music and the sounds of animals are given social meaning. Nowhere is this process of naturalisation clearer than in the heavily symbolic use of Echo in early modern texts.

Echo is a specialised example of sound that does not have meaning: it is accidental, mechanical repetition without regard for semiotic content. Nevertheless, in all of the uses of Echo as a literary and performance device covered in this book, Echo has the capacity to uncover the hidden meaning of the speaker's words, and add meaning and significance to a performance occasion. Sound and meaning cannot be separated as clearly as it initially seems they ought to be, and speakers are frequently shown to be making statements that they themselves are unaware of. Echo's punning potential is irresistible, but so is the sense that it offers of arcane and obscure inner meanings that are just out of reach. By attending to the proliferation of these possibilities of meaning, this book does not attempt to present a key to detecting the correct interpretation of instances of echo. Rather, it offers echo as a mechanism for listening to the fading sounds of the past.

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[1] These sometimes incorporate words but always contain more than semantic meaning. Schafer ([1977] 1994) posits a division between what he terms 'absolute and programmatic' music (103), but echo merges these categories together.

[2] I myself am here echoing Pierre Nora (1996) in his critique of the notion of 'what actually happened' in *Realms of Memory* (xxiv).

[3] See also Holger Syme's trenchant critique of Original Practices and Original Pronunciation in current theatre practice (Syme 2014).

[4] Shakespeare's texts are particularly susceptible to this figurative kind of echoing (Hansen and Wetmore, 2015).

[5] Tatar (1999) uses this kaleidoscope metaphor to describe the telling and retelling of fairy tales (ix).

[6] Bishop (1998) proposes this binary as the organising structure of the court masque (88-120).

[7] As we shall see in Chapter 4, Thomas Campion is the notable exception to this general rule.

[8] For a comprehensive account of Echo in the Classical and Renaissance traditions, see Loewenstein, 1984.

[9] See Hollander (1981, 55-60) for a discussion of the echo in *Comus*.

[10] In addition to these two, Abraham Fraunce does include the story of Echo and Narcissus in *The Third Part of the Countesse of Pembrokes Ivychurch* (1592), but his version seems to be based on Golding's.

[11] And Narcissus's story itself is an illustration of the veracity of the prophetic gift of Tiresias, whose blindness is explained in the story immediately preceding.

[12] Namely because she was punished for delaying Juno with her babbling.

[13] Gibbs and Ruiz (2008) make this point more generally about the *Metamorphoses* as a whole: that despite their assertion of change as the only constant, the myths themselves "remain" (559).

[14] Both Golding and T.H. follow Ovid closely in this respect.

[15] Though there is potential for a bawdy reading here too.

[16] This is in keeping with a more general neo-Platonic deprecation of the physical, and the concomitant Christian rejection of the worldly, though Gibbs and Ruiz (2008) see it as part of a more specifically Calvinist distaste for the body (571). Whether the voice should be considered part of the body or not is not clear, though.

[17] When quoting early modern texts I have silently corrected i/j and v/u throughout.

[18] Narcissus and Echo are recast as personifications of pride and flattery in William Warner's *Albion's England* (1602), making Golding's moralised presentation of Ovid more explicit.

[19] No pagination. Brown and Taylor (2013) print an extract from Caxton that contains part of the Echo and Narcissus story.

[20] The alignment of Echo's repetitions in the typesetting here produces a pleasing echo for the eye as well as the ear.

[21] Further references to this edition are given as page numbers in parentheses.

[22] See Robertson's comparisons of varying mss (Sidney 1973, 145).

[23] This is not to imply that such work is not important, though. On the complexities of the relationships between posited mss and witnesses, see Woudhuysen 2015, 41-55.

[24] In a natural echo, all of the sounds are repeated, but we only hear the final few syllables because they are not drowned out by the speaker continuing.

[25] Sidney's modern editors, including Katherine Duncan-Jones, Jean Robertson, and William A. Ringler are agreed that his echo poem is 'bad' verse, writing it off as juvenile experimentation. Nevertheless, Abraham Fraunce approvingly includes an extract in his *Arcadian Rhetorike* (1588).

[26] Humphrey Carpenter's (1985) comment in relation to Lewis Carroll's nonsense seems remarkably apt here: 'a simple idea pursued with a ruthless comic literalness to its very end' (45).

[27] Indeed, the question of whether English language poetry *should* rhyme in this way was a matter of debate, and in some alternative manuscripts of the *Old Arcadia* this debate is partly staged (Sidney 1973, 89-90). Hollander (1981) explores in some detail what he terms the 'micro-linguistic' phonological level of echo in poetics and how this operates in *Paradise Lost* (31-35 and 45-51).

[28] Day's source was Amyot's 1559 *Les Amours pastorales de Daphnis et Chloe* (Pavlovskis-Petit 2000, 1:864-5). George Thornley's translation appeared in 1657 and is thus not an Elizabethan translation as Hollander suggests (1981, 8).

[29] In contrast to Oberon's imagining of a nun's life in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, say.