"Changeling love":
The Function of Cupid in Fulke Greville's *Caelica*

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"Fulke Greville is a good boy": these words may well be the very first critical commentary on Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke (1554-1628), though they were originally intended not as a critical commentary on his work, but on his person. They were handwritten by Philip Sidney on his copy of Mateo Bandello's *Histoires Tragiques*, between 1564 and 1566, the years which both poets shared together at Shrewsbury School, and during which they first forged a friendship that would last through the rest of Sidney's life.[1] The critical commentary of the posterity, however, has not been so kind to Greville as Sidney himself was: indeed, it is not as a "good boy" but as a stern moralist and as a rigid religious poet that he has been mostly perceived in our century. His religious poetry has been more thoroughly discussed than his secular production: Yvor Winters' classification of Greville among the practitioners of the English "plain style" was entirely based on the austere, de-ornamented 22 poems of sacred content that close *Caelica*, his collection of sonnets and poems (Winters 1939, qtd. in Roche 1989: 295); and Joan Rees, in the most detailed study on Greville's works that we have, puts a major emphasis on the "interwoven strands of thought and experience" in his religious lyric (Rees 1971: 79 ff.). Nearly two decades ago, Germaine Warkentin argued that, beyond his dedication to religious meditations, Greville's work shows his intense "boredom with the intense focus on the self of the poet" that is at the core of Petrarchism (Warkentin 1980: 400); the present scarcity of bibliography on Greville's secular verse seems to confirm its absence from the central canon of English Renaissance poetry.[2]

Such a seeming consensus on Greville's relative lack of importance as a Petrarchist seems to be, at first sight, perfectly coherent with the poet's own approach to that part of his work. Even though the secular part of *Caelica* was composed betwen 1579 and 1583, the precise years during which his friend Sidney was working on his own *Astrophil and Stella,* Greville appears as a most serious and committed poet in the latter, sacred part of his sequence (from sonnet 84 onwards): as a lyricist, he seems to have been more motivated and moved by the subject of divine grace than by any form of profane love. All the documentary evidence that we have seems to show that, for him, poetry was

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[1] That friendship has been extensively documented by Duncan-Jones (1991).

[2] There is ony one book length study on Greville's poetry, excluding his other works (Waswo 1971). This is an extremely helpful, theoretically informed book, yet it also gives precedence to Greville's didactic and religious poems over his Petrarchan lyrics, which are nevertheless discussed in a brief but suggestive chapter.

only a secondary occupation: in strictly Puritan fashion, most of his efforts as a courtier were made in favour of the practical advancement of Protestant politics. Greville's allegiance to the cause of English radical Protestantism was as unswerving as Sidney's, and certainly more cautious and successful: even after Sidney's withdrawal from court, Greville was able to retain his influence in it, and to progress, later on, towards becoming the Treasurer of the Navy in 1598. It is perhaps not so immediately obvious, then, why he should have produced 84 carefully crafted poems that are clearly placed within the Petrarchan paradigm, especially if we take into account that the Puritan tradition to which he adhered had always been wary of profane poetry in itself. His rejection of his own love-lyrics at the end of *Caelica* goes beyond the conventional Petrarchan shift towards religious meditation, and turns into an absolute rejection of all human capacity for the creation of durable art-forms, since everything "that stands by fleshly wit, / Hath banished that truth, which should govern it" (Greville 1633, *Caelica* XCI): Greville goes beyond Sidney as distinction between "erected wit" and "infected will" (Sidney 1595), and sees "fleshly wit" and its products, both artistic or political, as always suspicious of corruption and sinfulness.

And yet, it is precisely the Puritan bent of Greville's final rejection of love poetry that can retrospectively clarify the significance of his own secular lyrics, and which can help us to understand the complex strategy behind their writing; a strategy that it will be part of my intention to explore here. My aim in these pages will be to suggest that Greville's Petrarchan poetry must be read as involving a very difficult balancing, or combination, of performance and critical distance: these first poems are clearly placed within the Petrarchan paradigm, and yet they must be read as a strong critical commentary on it. In the first part of *Caelica* we witness the acknowledgment and performance of a secular mode of writing that is, at the same time, identified as being morally doubtful by the poet: that moral ambiguity has to be made evident to the reader, but this will only be possible to the extent that this same reader admits that, as a discourse of profanity, Petrarchism can appeal to that which is profane within him/her. This poetic language has to be dismissed, but only after it has been adequately imitated and rehearsed; it is only then that the reader will be able to identify its moral weaknesses, and that he/she will be able to reject it effectively in favour of sacred and didactic verse.

The focus, or central image in Greville's discussion of secular love, is the image of Cupid, the son of Venus and god of love: there are 24 poems in Caelica that take him as their central motif, exploring his figure in different directions and making him a recurrent leit-motif throughout the first part of the collection. It is no coincidence that the poet should feel the need to treat this mythological subject at length, dedicating to it a special attention that no other motif in the sequence commands: the discussion of Cupid is actualy a discussion of *Cupiditas*, the tendency to the gratification of bodily desire. This thematic recurrence must actually be seen as the *crux* of Greville's confrontation with Petrarchism, and if it does not yield the best or most anthologised poems of the sequence, it certainly gives us an excellent standpoint to interpret it as a whole. The mythological topic in itself allowed, in this case, little room for individual innovation: the figure of the little son of Venus, blindfolded and naked, shooting arrows of lead and gold which will lead hearts to diverse affections, had been a topical element of the Petrarchan repertoire for some time, being most brilliantly used by Ronsard and other members of the *Pléiade*; Petrarch himself had had relatively little use for it, tending to leave the allegorical figure of Love without a clear physical image, or identifying it with a lady-as befitted the older, troubadouresque tradition of the *fin' amors*. The topical use of Cupid in the work of his followers, though, is related mostly to the theme of self-humiliation; it often signifies the submission of the higher capacities of man to the arbitrariety and illogicality of *Cupiditas*, as Cupid is shown operating inside the heart of the speaker, the site where the soul is metaphorically placed. It is there that Sidney's Astrophil presents him, for instance, in *Astrophil and Stella* sonnet 65:

> For when, nak'd Boy, thou couldst no harbour find   5
> In this old world, grown now so too too wise,
> I lodg'd thee in my heart, and being blind
> By nature born, I gave to thee mine eyes.
> (Sidney 1591, ll. 65, ll. 5-8)

Greville's *Caelica* XII offers an interesting variation on this same topic, probably written in response to Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* sonnet 65:

> Cupid, thou naughtie boy, when thou wert loathed,
> Naked and blind, for vagabunding noted,
> Thy nakedness I in my reason clothed,
> Mine eyes I gave thee, so was I devoted.
> (Greville 1633, IV, ll. 1-4)

The difference between both texts is slight but significant. The speaker in Sidney's sonnet admits that his soul ("my heart") and his subjective perspective ("mine eyes") are now dominated by Cupid; the speaker in Greville's sonnet goes further than this, and specifies that it is not merely in the heart, but specifically in his reason that Cupid has lodged himself ("Thy nakedness I in my reason clothed"); it is, moreover, only from a detached and disappointed perspective that he can observe this, relegating his love to the past ("so was I devoted"). Such a distanced precision is indicative both of Greville's accuracy in documenting the movements of the soul, and of his strict adherence to a Puritan psychology: reason does not appear here as free from the temptations and corruption of the senses, but as putting itself willingly at their service. This perspective brings the reader close to a Calvinist anthropology : as Calvin put it in the Institutes of Christian Religion, "unlawful and depraved desires are not placed in the sensual part merely, but in the mind itself" (Calvin 1559). Against the idealist tendencies of Neoplatonism, radical protestantism insisted on a concept of postlapsarian man as an integrally sinful entitiy, the rational soul being as corrupt, and as oriented towards materiality and self-gratification, as the body. Greville uses the image of Cupid not merely as the repetition of a commonplace reference, but as an opportunity of making a commentary on the unreliability of reason and its inevitable tendency to operate at the service of the senses.

This first example should call our attention to the fact that Greville's sonnets are very consciously built against the backdrop of a tradition that precedes them, and which is, in part, being critically revised in them: these poems must not be seen as written in contrast to Sidney (or in collaboration with him) for the narrow interpretive community epitomised in the Countess of Pembroke, but also as poems that are trying to establish their own space in the context, or the crevices, left by the whole tradition of Petrarchism. As a sonneteer, Greville revises the situational patterns of the tradition and indulges in the repetition of its central commonplaces; but even as he does so, he introduces from within it a critical twist that alters the whole of the established situation and forces the reader to question the basis of the original pattern. Part of the mechanism that is at play here is in fact the Humanist practice of *imitatio*, the appropriation of of the thematic and stylistic resources of the preceding authors: an appropriation that was not intended to be mechanical but creative, and which Petrarch and Bembo had recommended as being essential in the training of the apprentice writer. Obviously, though, as Petrarch had insisted in the *Familiares*, *imitatio* should not only be seen as a neutral copy in the early stages of apprenticeship; on the contrary, it should be useful even for a well-trained author as a means of intellectual nourishment and continual improvement, kept "not only in the memory, but in the marrow", so that the author would be skilful enough to "absorb" the received influences in his own fashion (Petrarch, *Familiares* 22.2, qtd. in Navarrete 1994), and to create something that was, in the final analysis, essentially new while acknowledging its debt to the past. This is precisely the kind of synthesis that we can find in Greville's secular poetry: the topic of

Love's wickedness and unreliability, which had been introduced by Petrarch into vernacular lyrics in *Rime Sparse* sonnet 55 ("Amor...vol che tra duo contrari me destempre / et tende lacci in sì diverse tempre" – Petrarch 1993: 133) is given a remarkably innovative treatment in one of the early sonnets in *Caelica* (XVIII):

> I offer wrong to my beloved saint:
> I scorn, I change, I falsify my love,
> Absence and time have made my homage faint,
> With Cupid I do everywhere remove.
> I sigh, I sorrow, I doe play the fool   5
> (Greville 1633, XVIII, ll. 1-5)

In this case, the reference seems confined to the fourth line; before that, the speaker has already had occasion to surprise us by letting us know directly, in a quick succession of short clauses ("I offer wrong (...) I scorn, I change, I falsify my love") that he is, on some occasions, unable to keep the faithfulness that is required by his "saint"; he does in fact shift and alter his feeling, and does "everywhere remove", just like the god of love does. The very mention of Cupid allows the speaker, through the figural admission of his likeness to him, to present himself as violating the most essential attribute of the Petrarchan lover: faithfulness towards the object of his desire. The very presence of this mythological reference, then, involves a modification of the ethical self-perception of the speaker; and while that reference can be used as a basis for self-criticism, it can also become the basis for an equally stern critique of his beloved, as becomes evident in *Caelica* XXVI:

> Straight do I scorn and bid the child away,
> The boy knows fury, and soon showeth me   10
> Caelica's sweet eyes, where love and beauty play,
> Fury turns into love of that I see.
> If these mad changes do make children gods,
> Woman, and children are not far at odds.
> (Greville 1633, XXVI, ll. 9-14)

These lines show a typically Grevillean use of *metalepsis*, as the speaker is shown reaching a conclusion based on false premises: if lack of constance and mutability are the prerogatives of Cupid, then women could surely claim their own right to divinity, since these are also their defining characteristics. The misogynistic connotations of the couplet should not be lost on the reader: they are one of the speaker's first explicit pronouncements against the object of his desire, and through it, Greville is trying to place that speaker at some distance from the topical Petrarchan lover, as he phrases an implicit attack against the traditional iconisation of the beloved. By comparing her to Cupid, the speaker is not merely granting her a god-like status, in traditional fashion: he is, first and foremost, calling the reader's attention towards her childish inconcistency, just as he has previously stated his own lack of faithfulness to her. The commonplace fabric of the Petrarchan discourse appears to manifest, on close inspection, a series of gaps or inconsistencies, and Fulke Greville is subtly leading his reader to their discovery, and towards a critical perspective from which to re-examine them.

Once these critical accents have made their way into the canonical discourse, they cannot be so easily dispelled; the practice of *imitatio*, or creative reworking of the original models, has led into the incorporation of new parodic tones. The Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin was the first to observe that the Renaissance practice of *imitatio* must necessarily lead, in the long run, to cases of polyphony or

intertextuality. According to Bakhtin, creative imitation entails polyphony, that is, the integration of different voices into the same text, because there is a clash between the original model and the latter discourse, in which the latter is given a new, subversive orientation (Bakhtin 1985: 51-67). This parodic thrust brings forward, therefore, a cancellation of monologism and an opening towards the confrontation of several voices, sometimes within the same text. A clear example of such a confrontation of different voices takes place in the dialogue between the poet and Cupid presented in *Caelica* LXXI. Dialogues such as these were, in themselves, commonplace strategies since Petrarch's *Rime Sparse* sonnet 15: usually the voice of the despairing lover would be consoled, or soothed, by the words of Love itself. In this case, however, it is the speaker himself who begins by accusing the god-child, and directly asking for an explanation or a justification of his sad predicament as a lover:

> And do you now return lean with despair?
> Wounded with rivals' war, scorch'd with jealousy?   5
> Hence changeling; Love doth no such colours wear:
> Find sureties, or at honour's sessions die.
> (Greville 1633, LXXI, ll. 4-8)

From the outset love is presented here not as an abstract entity -as often in Petrarch- but rather as a deformed image of itself: not only as the playful and witty Cupid of previous poems in *Caelica,* but as a lean "changeling" of whom the lover has every right to ask for an explanation, as a master would ask of his servant. He appears before him "wounded" and "scorch'd", and is immediately dismissed from the speaker's presence in menacing terms: the lover is not at the orders of love, but rather gives orders to love himself ("find sureties, or at oure sessions die"). In the rest of *Caelica* LXXI we find a parodic reversal of the conventional situation of the Petrarchan lover, and of his submission to the absolute power of love:

> Sir, know me for your own, I only bear
> Faith's ensign, which is shame, and misery;   10
> My paradise, and Adam's diverse were:
> His fall was knowledge, mine simplicity.
>
> What shall I do, Sir? do me prentice bind,
> To knowledge, honour, fame or honesty;
> Let me no longer follow womenkind,   15
> Where change doth use all shapes of tyranny;
> And I no more will stir this earthly dust,
> Wherein I lose my name, to take on lust.
> (Greville 1633, LXXI, ll. 9-18)

The reversal of roles has been completed, and finds its expression in the confrontation of the two voices in the poem: first, the severe, reproaching tone of the lover; then the pleading, humble tone of love itself. We cannot speak, however, of a full 'dialogic' structure in this poem: The traditional monologism of Petrarchan sonnet has been broken into two contending voices which speak out the parodic situation being enacted. We do not really find a confrontation of separate levels of language, for both speakers are using the same elevated linguistic registers, far from popular forms of expression. Still, the tones being employed by each of the speakers are clearly different; the speech of love being most remarkable in its use of a syntax that is filled with structures of supplication and of questioning ("What shall I do, Sir?", "Know me for your own", "Let me no longer follow womenkind"...) and in his designation of the lover as "Sir": here, the convention of the lover as a *servant* to the forces of love, which had dominated European poetry since the twelfth century, is not only altered, but radically subverted.

The result of such a transformation is, of course, the relativization of love itself, and the emptying of the very word "love" of its conventional content, in the final couplet of the poem. But before that final demystification takes place, the poem has also confronted the theologization of feeling that is at the core of the Petrarchan tradition: it cannot be seen as a form of faith, but only bears "Faith's ensigny"; its own 'fall' was not brought about by knowledge, such as Adam's, but by simplicity. If love had been seen, up to now, as the condition which could most clearly exemplify the divided and problematic conscience of fallen man, Greville denies it even this representative quality, and recognizes it exclusively as "lust", stirrer of this "earthly dust", not necessarily of the human spirit in its entirety. We have to remember that the will, *voluntas,* which is traditionally the site of love, is not part of the vegetative soul, but a prerogative of the rational, human soul; Greville denies i this position, and relocates it in the "earthly dust" of which each human body is made; in the material component which humanity shares with the lower beasts.

Parody works here as a demystifying rewriting of a previously existing language, in a way that seems to fit Bakhtin's theorisation precisely. The first uses of the word 'parody' in English appear in two well-known literary texts: the first is George Herbert's *A Parodie*, which is a rewriting of a love poem by the Earl of Rochester, published in 1633; the second is the second version of Ben Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour* (the 1616 edition) where the term is applied to a grotesque rendering of a poem by Samuel Daniel. Writing in the 1580s, Greville probably knew the term *parodia* from Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*, whence the term was taken to be included in Francis Holyoke's etymological dictionary in 1627.[3] Holyoke, following Quintilian, would define parody as a "turning of versre into another signification by altering some words", giving them a new set of connotations; and that is precisely what Greville does in *Caelica,* turning conventional Petrarchism into a parodic discourse. But a parody of what?

If we concentrate on the specific attributes of Cupid as presented in the sequence, an answer to this question soon begins to suggest itself. All through the whole of *Caelica* the reader sees Greville trying to manipulate this mythological reference in order to provide his speaker with an curious theological system. Cupid's blindness, the arbitrariety of his shots, the irrationality of love, are repeatedly lamented and presented as the ultimate cause of the speaker's suffering, but they are described in a vocabulary ("rod", "election", "choice"), that, as Thomas P. Roche, Jr. has put it, is "fraught with Protestant or biblical overtones" (1989: 303-4).[4] What Roche doesn't explore is the fact that, through the use of this vocabulary, and also of the classical attributes of Cupid, Greville consistently builds a parodic distortion of radical Protestantism, establishing similarities between the paradoxes of human love and the paradoxes of God's love according to Calvinist exegesis. For Cupid also "elects" his victims, also moves their hearts and makes them wretched or blessed without seeming merit on the part of the subject, as the poems repeatedly insist:

> Make not then your owne mischance,
> Wake your selfe from Passions-traunce,
> And let Reason guide affection,   105
> From despaire to new election
>
> (...)

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[3] The first uses of the English term 'parody' and its listing in Holyoke's dictionary, as well as a study of its significance in Herbert's title, are discussed in detail by Martin (1996).

[4] Roche sees a "continuity" being suggested here between human and sacred love, rather than the systematic parody of Protestant devotion that, in my opinion, is being carried out: for Greville, the language of human love is always seen as tending to parody.

Love teares Reason's law in sunder,
Love, is god, let reason wonder,
For nor scorne of his affection,
Nor despaire in his election,
Nor his faith damn'd for obeying   215
Nor her change, his hopes betraying,
Can make Philocell remove,
But he Caelica will love.
(Greville 1633, LXXV, ll. 103-106; 211-218)

Such a clear admission of theological overtones in the rhetoric of love, and their development into a parodic theological system, goes hand in hand, in Greville, with the recognition of its limitations, and especially of its truly secular, earthly nature. The religion of love may be seen as a deformed image of God's relationship to man, but its scope is far more narrow, operating only in the sublunar sphere, without ever reaching above it:

Mercurie, Cupid, Mars, they be no Gods,
But humane Idols, built up by desire,   20
Fruit of our thoughts, whence heaven maketh rods,
And babyes too for child-thoughts that aspire:
Who sees their glories, on the earth must prye;
Who seeks true glory must looke to the skye.
(Greville 1633, LXII, ll. 19-24)

The anti-platonism of these last lines is the same we had already detected in *Caelica* IV: once more, Greville reminds us ostensibly of the impossibility of experiencing a true intellectual or spiritual elevation through human love. And this only confirms the necessarily parodic nature of that love: it can reproduce the effects of divine love, it can be as mysterious as God's plans for each individual; ultimately, though, it is circumscribed to the sublunar sphere, and thus it can be no more than a deformed imitation –that is: a parody, precisely– of its archetype in the domain of spirituality, which for Greville is the ultimate, true reality.

The demystification of the Petrarchan *topoi* that takes place in the sequence, then, is to be seen in the light of this radical distinction between the domains of spirituality and of human experience: there is an abyss separating individual psychology from divine love and knowledge, and to pretend otherwise, as the Neoplatonic and Petrarchan traditions did, is to build an inconsistent system of epistemology and a language that cannot resist a rigorous analysis. Greville thus uses the myth of Cupid as the key parodic figure in his sequence, deforming through it the formal and situational conventions of secular love poetry, and using it so as to reveal their emptiness; the topical "religion of love" can only be seen as a distortion, a deformed counter-image of true religious practice. Moreover, we should note that the parodic deformations, along with the breaks and shifts in style they involve, can only work to full effect, as we have been observing, if the reader is aware of the models that are being used as objects of parody: Greville's belated position in the history of Petrarchism, writing more two centuries after Petrarch, makes itself all the more evident as he is using it to his own advantage, trying to get the reader to participate in his ironic unmasking of an entire system of representation. We must be aware of his religious motivations for doing so if we are to understand *Caelica* correctly, but it is mostly his intelligence as a poet, and the daring combination of poetic performance and critical practice that we observe in his verse, that should encourage us to continue working towards a detailed re-evaluation of his work and of its place in sixteenth-century English poetry.

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