

Mulcaster's Tyrant Sound

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In Shakespeare's *King Lear*, loyal Kent reserves the following bit of vituperation for dissembling Oswald: "Thou whoreson zed, thou unimportant letter!" (2.2.62). Even for early seventeenth-century audiences, the insult bore the residue of a bygone era, and indeed, it registers fittingly in the mouth of a gray-bearded Kent.¹ "Z," writes Richard Mulcaster in 1582, "is a consonant much heard amongst us, and seldom sene" (1925:136). For reasons that I will shortly make clear, the pejorative currency of the letter Z would have obtained greater purchase in the latter half of the sixteenth century; that is, roughly from the date of John Hart's letter (1551, addressed to Edward VI) first calling for an English alphabet based purely on the sounds of men's voices, to the earliest performances of Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* (probably 1594/95), which stages the absurdity of such counsel as Hart's.² In between these very general chronological parameters, the debate over the range and uniformity of the English alphabet turned primarily on the position allocated to sound. Should sound govern the pen, or should orthography be subordinate to custom or usage? Do English voices and sounds possess the inherent qualities that would render them amenable to writing? Or can writing reliably record and reproduce English sounds? Eventually, it seems a notion that "being written" was the quality most necessary to render a language "able to be written" began—usually without their authors' knowledge—to be reflected in the orthographical treatises of the sixteenth century. In this paper, I shall look at what happens to sound in the course of this realization, especially in connection with humanist pedagogy. The orthographic debate was, after all, waged chiefly among teachers, a point that leads me to reflect on the confluence of pedagogical theories with those of right writing. Of particular interest in this regard is Richard Mulcaster (1531/32-1611), headmaster of Elizabethan London's largest school, whose orthographical treatise, the *Elementarie* (1582), claims somewhat surprisingly to be a work of pedagogical theory. So, at issue in the following discussion is how a conception of the relationship between speech and writing can be relevant to subjectivity, in this case of children in an educational system.

¹ Kent is disguised at this point in the play, and it is of course likely that the insult, like the gray beard, is intended to contribute to his ruse. He could also be snidely referring to the pronunciation of O[z]wald.

² Robert Robinson's *The Art of Pronunciation* (1617) is one example of a rare late and last-gasp effort to rehearse the orthographical practice of the sixteenth-century phonemic reformers.

The *Elementarie* has been contested in this manner before, most notably in Jonathan Goldberg's *Writing Matter* (1990). In such analyses, the terms "orality" and "literacy" are refracted through sixteenth-century orthography to give us the respective polarities of "sound" and "writing," and henceforth they can be applied to both or either one of the pedagogical terms of "nature" and "nurture"—the designation and relationship of these latter two terms depends on one's approach to the former ones. Goldberg's approach is to locate the *Elementarie*—especially its account of the origins of writing—within the "history of the gramme" (Derrida 1976:84), and therefore finds in Mulcaster's avowed but failed logocentrism a sense that "what is, what existence is, literally, is writing. A retroactive textuality will rename this origin, calling it nature, the oral, shielding it from writing" (Goldberg 1990:21). And, because a "politics of pedagogy . . . coincides with the textual effects" of the *Elementarie* (34), Goldberg maintains that, for Mulcaster, children must be properly inscribed in order to be "(re)inscribed within the pedagogic scheme" (31), one that reinforces "place and hierarchies of order" (37) and inscribes "subjects within structures of belief and obedience" (36); another chapter is devoted to the violence of these literal and metaphorical acts of inscription (58-107). The brutality of this reprogramming process seems most manifest in the disciplinary measures employed by schoolmasters, contemporary anecdotes of which have been used by a number of other recent and useful studies to help define the culture of the Renaissance classroom (Halpern 1991:19-60; Stewart 1997:84-121; Gaggero 2004; Enterline 2006) and of pedagogy in general (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Ball 1991). A focus on the beaten boy and the cruelty of his teachers has had the benefit of counterbalancing much earlier twentieth-century scholarship that tended to valorize humanist pedagogues on the basis of their idealistic assertions. Erasmus' pronouncement in 1529 that "schools have become torture-chambers; you hear nothing but . . . howling and moaning, and shouts of brutal abuse" (Verstraete 1985:325) seems, for example, to have been of little interest to E. T. Campagnac, who notes in his 1925 introduction to the *Elementarie* that its "words stand for ideas which must ever lie at the foundation of any orderly and wholesome system of education" (Mulcaster 1925:xiv). Taken again at face value, however, these same "words" are now more liable to stand for miniature robots (re)programmed with the lash. "Orthography," writes Muriel Bradbrook, "serves . . . as a social index" (1964:129); the study of orthography no less so.

Although discipline is not the main focus of this essay, its relevance here stems from the fact that in the Renaissance (as it was in medieval and, to a lesser extent, in classical times) learning language was intimately connected with punishment; this was especially true for learning Latin, as Walter Ong has shown in his essay, "Latin Language Study as a Renaissance Puberty Rite" (1959). Illustrations depicting scenes from the Renaissance classroom invariably position the switch within close reach of the presiding headmaster, but it is worth remembering that there were pictures of reward too; Alexander Nowell's 1593 edition of *Catechism or Institution of Christian Religion*, for example, contains an illustration of a master rewarding his pupil with what appears to be an apple. There was a great deal of debate among humanists about the administration of punishment and reward, and at the center of these discussions was a conception about the nature of children. Given the relationship between language and discipline, what will the *Elementarie* have to say about nature and the uses of the lash? If Latin is associated with masculinity and punishment, and vernaculars with the feminine and domestic (Ong 1959:

108), what are the implications—disciplinary or otherwise—of a vernacular orthography that admits a deep love of English? Of course, the *Elementarie* could be read simply as a desire to make juridical (and masculine) what was once driven by imitation alone, but the textual effects of a vernacular orthography will, I argue, retain features of its sounded and imitative qualities—a retention from which certain disciplinary as well as ontological conclusions may be put forward.

As the case may be, Mulcaster seems to have acquired a reputation of being a particularly malicious headmaster, though this is based largely on two pieces of anecdotal evidence not unanimously regarded as reliable.³ The reputation persists regardless: Christopher Gaggero, for instance, has argued that Mulcaster's primary objective in the classroom was to "instill fear and pain," which distanced his reforms from earlier humanist conversations about the usefulness of pleasure in learning (2004:168-69). Mulcaster's own thoughts on the subject of discipline were laid out one year prior to the publication of the *Elementarie*, and they are ambivalent; on the one hand, Mulcaster argues that "the cheife and chariest point is, so to plie them all, as they may proceede voluntarily, and not with violence . . . never fearing the rod, which he will not deserve" (1994:39); or that masters should not beat "the parentes folly, and the childes infirmitie, with his owne furie. All which extremities some litle discretion would easely remove" (36); on the other, he advises that "the rod may no more be spared in schooles, then the sworde in the Princes hand" (270). Nevertheless, accounts of arbitrary cruelty in the Tudor classroom have been accepted in much recent scholarship as definitive; Foucault leads the way in this regard, especially with his claims for the "everywhere and always alert" power of discipline that he describes in *Discipline and Punish* (1977:177). In such terms, discipline and inscription share some common features in Renaissance cultural studies, namely an absolute and inescapable dimension of control and fixity, metaphorically and literally.

However, I do not believe this theoretical state can be inferred from Mulcaster's texts: "sound" or orality in this master's pedagogy troubles any notion of a primary fixed and inscribed nature, a disruption that is set out allegorically in the *Elementarie*. In my account of Mulcaster's orthography, nature is implicated in terms that suggest sound as well as inscription, and his theories can be defined as interplay between these two media. Indeed, if Mulcaster's orthography and pedagogy are concomitant, then the story told in the *Elementarie*—especially in the context of Mulcaster's other reforms—is one of the "physical and emotional presence" of sound negotiating and creating its agency within and through culturally inscribed forms (Feld 1996:97). Put another way, I argue that, although writing pins its hopes "on the resistance that the *establishment of a place* offers to the erosion of time," sound does so "on a clever *utilization of time*, of the opportunities it presents and also of the play that it introduces into the foundations of

³ In 1855, H. Fleetwood Sheppard reproduced a story about a mock marriage ceremony conducted by Mulcaster for "Lady Burch" (the birch used for beating) and an unfortunate boy's "buttocks" (260); Sheppard attributed the anecdote to an individual named Thomas Wateridge, supposedly alive during the reign of James VI/I. Barker (Mulcaster 1994:lxxv) notes that no record exists for an individual of that name in this context, and that the original document, if it was ever genuine, is now likely lost. Barker, in any case, feels the story "has the facetious air of the jest-book about it" (lxv). A second related anecdote appears in Thomas Fuller's short biography of Mulcaster in *The History of the Worthies of England* (1662:Sss2r-v), where the teacher's "severity" is likened to the brutality of Horace's headmaster, "Plagosus Orbilius" (Sss2v; and see Horace, *Epistles* 2.1.70-71). There are, however, several historical inaccuracies in Fuller's account, and, indeed, it "may be based less on any ascertainable facts than on Fuller's self-confessed intention to amuse his readers" (Barker in Mulcaster 1994:lxxi).

power” (de Certeau 1984:38-39). This makes neither sound nor writing—including the various qualities to which they are often attached—entities that act in isolation or independence.

What is under consideration, then, is not whether orality persisted in the Renaissance classroom, but how it functioned in a politics of pedagogy (read partially through an orthography). In any case, the question of whether elements of an oral and aural culture could remain in a literate and visual culture seems now to have passed its critical shelf life. Walter Ong (1965), among others, has demonstrated the extent to which an “oral residue” persisted in Tudor writing, and this situation can be widely attributed to the rhetorical training received by children in the sixteenth-century schoolroom. Students were taught and judged chiefly by their oral performance skills (in the form of *pronuntiatio et actio*, or delivery, the final part of rhetoric), and many of these skills—like the development of *copia*, for example—were conveyed in and through students’ written compositions. More recent scholarship has also shown that orality and literacy are “not two separate and independent things,” but rather “overlapping” activities that modify each other as well as co-exist in a variety of situations depending on “factors such as time, location, purpose, and the identity and status of the communicators” (Fox and Woolf 2002:8; see Graff 1987:25 and Finnegan 1988:174). Mulcaster’s descriptions of sound and writing highlight some of the tensions of this mutual influence and co-existence. So, although it is tempting to “valorize the oral as more immediate and personal than the written,” Mulcaster and his humanist predecessors actually reveal a conception of text as both spatial and aural, dead and also alive (Fox and Woolf 2002:9). Examples of this paradigm are numerous, not only in the “oral residue” of Tudor prose and poetry,⁴ but also in direct advice concerning the instruction of grammar and composition. For instance, in the instruction of Latin, Erasmus advocates “the conversation of actual speakers in social relationships” (Elsky 1989:38) as an alternative to the rote memorization of grammatical rules: “For a true ability to speak correctly,” states Erasmus in 1512, “is best fostered both by conversing and consorting with those who speak correctly and by the habitual reading of the best stylists” (McGregor 1978:669).⁵ As Richard Halpern has noted of the early sixteenth century, texts came to be perceived “as an individualized voice or style” rather than the “incarnation of grammatical rules” (1991:33). Such a way of thinking about texts denies the death of the tongue, even when, in Mulcaster’s words, it is “fre from motion” and “shrined up in books” (1925:177). It is to these letters that I now turn, with a background of the sixteenth-century orthographical debate providing some context for Mulcaster’s own reforms.

The relatively short life of the English phonetic alphabet begins in the lecture halls at Cambridge in the 1530s,⁶ where two eminent scholars, Thomas Smith and John Cheke,

⁴ I have already noted Ong’s general contribution, but for a discussion of a specific Renaissance poem in this regard, see, for example, John Webster’s essay on Spenser’s epic-romance, *The Faerie Queene* (1590, 1596); Mulcaster’s student is argued to have employed a style that “reflects assumptions and expectations of oral poetry,” the presence of which “establishes the poem’s central aesthetic conditions” (1976:76).

⁵ Erasmus is responding to Cicero’s claim in *De Oratore* that “the whole art of oratory . . . is concerned in some measure with the common practice, custom, and speech of mankind” (Sutton 1948:1.3.12). On the relationship between rhetoric and conversation in the Renaissance, see Richards 2003:43-55.

⁶ For more detailed accounts of this aspect of humanist reform, see Dobson 1968 and Denison and Hogg 2006, as well as critical assessments by—especially as they pertain to the present discussion—Bradbrook 1964, DeMolen 1991:103-16, and Goldberg 1990:171-229.

controversially introduced a reformed pronunciation of Greek that met the standards set by Erasmus in *De Recta Latini Graecique sermonis pronuntiatione* (1528). The reform was based on the premise that medieval scholasticism as well as vernacular *sermo* had infected the pronunciation of classical tongues, a situation that, in turn, necessitated a project for the recovery of the sounds of these languages as they were heard in classical times. Stephen Gardiner, the conservative chancellor of Cambridge University, was not amused by this project, and his objections, along with Cheke's replies, were published by Cheke in *De Pronuntiatione Graecae potissimum linguae disputationes* (1555). Earlier, in 1542, Gardiner had been presented with a draft of Smith's *De recta et emendata Linguae Graecae Pronuntiatione*, which would later be published in Paris (1568). The guiding principle in the amendments of Cheke and Smith was that there existed an isomorphic relationship between letters and sounds, since the Greeks would not have devised superfluous or unnecessary letters to express the sounds of their language; and it was out of these principles that interest in an English phonetic alphabet began to emerge, with Smith publishing his endorsement to this purpose in *De recta & emendata Linguae anglicae scriptione, dialogus* (1568). John Hart's letter to Edward VI in 1551,⁷ then, must be understood largely as a consequence of his association with Smith and Cheke at Cambridge; although, because it was not borne upon a desire to recapture the sounds of antiquity, Hart's wish for a phonetic script was grounded firmly in what he perceived as the needs of English speakers (particularly as they adjusted to the burden of interpretation placed upon them by the Reformation), as well as of foreigners attempting to read what was mainly an inconsistent and mutable English spelling.

Hart finally published his views in *An orthographie* (1569), the title page of which promises to show "howe to write or paint thimage of mannes voice." Acknowledging in the preface his debt to Smith, Hart promises "to use as many letters in our writing, as we doe voyces or breathes in speaking, and no more" (B3r), a phrase that might have transposed in Hart's new orthography (an alphabet and exercise for which appears at the end of his treatise) as follows: *tu iuz az mani leters in our ureiting, az ui du voises or breds in speking, and no mor*. Hart may have had a universal alphabet in mind, but for his near contemporary, William Bullokar, the need to reform spelling phonetically rises directly from "almost thirtie yeares" of frustration as a schoolmaster, responsible for teaching children "who guided by the eye with the letter, and giuing voyce according to the name thereof . . . yeilded to the eare of the hearer a clean contrary sound to the word looked for" (1580:B1r). "Heereby," as he records, "grewe quarels in the teacher." According to Bullokar, the main obstacle to a uniform English spelling is the use of an alphabet of "letters twentie fower" when there are in fact "fortie and fower" divisions of voice in the English tongue (C1r). Hence, Bullokar devises an alphabet of forty-one "letterz" (D1r-v), with various diacritics to distinguish their sounds even further. As one might expect, few were won over by these reforms, "since, as the more perceptive quickly saw, the uses of language are too varied to be controlled by fiat; so that science degenerated into affection on one hand and eccentric pedantry on the other" (Bradbrook 1964:130). Indeed, one of the only surviving examples of an attempt to emulate these amendments is, in all likelihood, a prank: Robert Laneham's 1575 letter describing the "soomerz progress" of the "Queenz Maiesty at

⁷ Reprinted in Danielsson 1955-63.

Killingwoorth Castl” (A1r) was arguably written by William Patten (O’Kill 1977; Scott 1977) as a jibe against the former;⁸ the phonetic spelling in this case may have been employed to contribute to an overall sense of Laneham in the letter as an “egocentric and amiable buffoon, with antiquarian tastes and a love for old stories” (Woudhuysen 2004).

It was under such conditions that Z languished. Other letters, however, might have counted themselves fortunate to be the fond plaything of pedants. John Baret’s *An Alvearie or Triple Dictionarie* (1574), to which Thomas Smith is one of the dedicatees, calls for C to be deposed as a usurper, one who has “absurdely” maneuvered into a “third place of honour” in the alphabet, and for whom K and S already serve to sound (L3r). It is a spectacular fall from grace for the letter, since, only a decade earlier, it had housed within its curvature none other than Elizabeth I (in a detail for the C in “Constantine”) in the dedication page of John Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments* (1563:B1r). A more cruel punishment is set aside for E, which, as Baret advises, must be “geld out . . . especially in the latter end of woordes . . . which signifie nothing” (1574:X5v). Once silent, now also castrated, it is hoped that the banishment of the final E will “amend a great deal of our corrupt writing.”⁹ Nevertheless, Baret keeps the much-abused E in his *Alvearie*, recognizing at last the impossibility for “any private man” to amend an orthography—he is content for the moment to wait “untill the learned Universities have determined upon the truth thereof,” and for this truth to be “publickly taught and used in the Realme.” In fact, as Baret (who was a teacher at Cambridge and then in London) admits in the address to his readers, the dictionary is largely a compilation of his “pupils at Cambridge studious of the Latin tongue” who, “within a yeare or two,” had “gathered together a great volume, which (for the apt similitude betweene the good scholers and diligent Bees in gathering their wax and hony into their Hive) I called then their Alvearie” (*5r).¹⁰ So, although *An Alvearie* does not implement the phonetic spelling of the orthographic reformers, the source of its invective toward certain letters is—as it is in the works of Smith, Hart, and Bullokar—a yearning

⁸ Whatever the letter’s intended purpose, the description of the Queen’s summer progress to Kenilworth Castle in July 1575 is of great interest to historians and literary scholars. See also George Gascoigne’s *The Princely Pleasures at the Court of Kenilworth* (1575), reprinted in various editions of his works.

⁹ The assignment of corporeal metaphors for language was common practice in the Renaissance, with Ben Jonson’s “speake that I may see thee” passage from *Timber* (1640) only the most famous: “Some men are tall, and bigge, so some Language is high and great . . . Some are little, and Dwarfes: so of speech it is humble, and low.” Language has “skinne,” as well as “flesh, blood, and bones” (1925-63:VIII, 625-27), and Bruce Smith has described how Jonson’s choice of conceit was “anything but arbitrary,” since it involved the “mechanism that produces speech” (1999:97). While for Jonson this conceit elaborates style rather than grammar, it is employed with similar purpose in orthography. Hart and Mulcaster, though their opinions on the relationship between sound and writing differ, are yet in agreement that letters, in some form, are given the task to “mediate between sound-in-the-body and sound-on-the-page” (*ibid.*:121). “The common denominator in this transaction,” writes Smith, “is body: paper and ink as material entities stand in for muscles and air as material entities.” In the *Elementarie*, words have bone, sinew, and flesh, but they also have a “soulish substance” called “prerogative” (Mulcaster 1925:177), which turns out to be nothing more than speech.

¹⁰ “Alvearie,” from the Latin *alvearium* (“a range of bee-hives”), became, at least by the early eighteenth century, a term used in anatomy for the waxy “hollow of the external ear” (*OED*). In 1580, Baret added a fourth language, Greek, to his dictionary, and published it as *An Alvearie or Quadruple Dictionary*; his sentiments about the connection between letters and sounds (and resultant abuse for those letters that failed to sound), however, remained unchanged from the 1574 dictionary.

by its author to “devize so many severall characters, to shew . . . the very facion and sound of every title of our woordes in letters to the eie” (X5v).

The classroom is an abiding presence in sixteenth-century orthographies, both in the motives for reform and in the delineation of their bodied letters. On the Elizabethan stage, such associations between teaching and orthography took further inspiration from the *commedia dell'arte* tradition, with Shakespeare's Holofernes in *Love's Labour's Lost* being the classic example of a stock pedant. But, in spite of Richard DeMolen's argument to the contrary (1991:159-65), we must think of Hart rather than Mulcaster as the inspiration for Shakespeare's pedant, at least with respect to spelling and pronunciation. Holofernes' complaint that “rackers of orthography” pronounce “‘dout’ *sine* ‘b’, when he should say ‘doubt’, ‘det’ when he should pronounce ‘debt’” is resonant with Hart's attempt to use only those letters that sound “and no more,” rather than Mulcaster's rejoinder that even non-sounding letters can be kept for reasons of etymology and custom (5.1.19-21). In any case, Shakespeare's play highlights the strong identification between orthography and pedagogy, whose aims, it appears, were inseparable. Certainly, this appears to be the case for Mulcaster when he claims that his orthographic treatise, the *Elementarie*, has emerged, at least stylistically, “from the students forge” (1925:281). The “forge” in this case is not only Mulcaster's own experience as a student at Eton, Cambridge (B.A.), and then at Oxford (M.A.), but also his tenure as headmaster of Merchant Taylors' School, where he taught from the school's inception in 1561 until his resignation over a wage dispute in 1586.¹¹ Famous pupils during this period include the poet Edmund Spenser, the playwrights Thomas Kyd and Thomas Lodge, the preacher and translator Lancelot Andrewes (as well as five other translators of the 1611 King James Bible), both royal physicians (to Elizabeth I and James VI/I), and the politician and colonizer Edwin Sandys.¹² Mulcaster's pedagogical reforms, which he claims are based on “two and twentie yeares” of teaching (1994:16), are extant in two works, the first being *Positions* (1581)—a book that announces itself as the “very first foundation” (17) upon which his subsequent reforms will be built—and the second, published one year later, being the *Elementarie*. Superficially, however, it is somewhat misleading to include the *Elementarie* as part of Mulcaster's pedagogical reform, since the majority of this work is occupied with orthography. Indeed, although Mulcaster promises in *Positions* to provide a five-part elementary curriculum following the order of “Reading, Writing, Drawing, Musick by voice, and instrument” (37), its first installment, instead of reading (an oral exercise), “entreateth chiefelie of the right writing of our English tung.”¹³ Justification for this reversal is provided by Mulcaster in the dedicatory epistle: “For can reading be right before writing be righted, seing we read nothing else, but what we se written?” (1925:Epistle). Jonathan

¹¹ Detailed descriptions of Mulcaster's life may be found in DeMolen 1991:1-42 and Barker (in Mulcaster 1994:lix-lxxviii).

¹² An extensive list of Mulcaster's distinguished alumni appears in DeMolen 1991:36-37.

¹³ This quotation is from the title page of the *Elementarie*. In the dedicatory epistle to the Earl of Leicester, Mulcaster explains that he will publish each part of the elementary curriculum in separate volumes, “chiefelie for the printer, whose sale will be quik if the book be not big” (1925:Epistle). If they were ever written, the remaining divisions of his elementary (reading, drawing, singing, and musical instruments) are not extant. The contemporary influence of *Positions* and the *Elementarie* is discussed by Barker (in Mulcaster 1994:xxxv-viii).

Goldberg discovers in the *Elementarie*'s displacement of reading by writing a pattern that is replicated in the aims and strategies of Mulcaster's orthography and pedagogy: "Mulcaster's attempt to transfer an originary value from a secondary place . . . reveals the social, historical, and ideological work that is involved in the attempt to found an origin" (1990:30). The implications of such an attempt are, apparently, the brutality and inequality of a pedagogical system that is at once representative of and also subservient to the dominant power structures of society. However, while I follow an approach that identifies pedagogical theory and practice within an orthographical project, I believe the degree to which an "originary value" has been supplanted in the *Elementarie* is not as absolute as Goldberg claims—nor are Mulcaster's designs as sinister. Retracing the substance of Goldberg's argument, and articulating my reply, will involve the reevaluation of a key passage in the *Elementarie*, one that encapsulates Mulcaster's contribution to English orthography and, as we would both argue, a politics of pedagogy too.

With the *Elementarie*, Mulcaster effectively challenges the phonemic reforms of Smith, Hart, and Bullokar. And it is with an allegory of sound that he demonstrates not only the inadequacies of a phonemic alphabet, but also the principles that will underpin his orthography. Mulcaster prefaces his allegory of sound by announcing that a full account of the origins of writing would be "fruteles," as there can be no "certaintie . . . of so old a thing"—although he is willing to suggest that "deliuerie of learning by the pen to posteritie, was not the first cause that found out letters;" rather, he ascribes the cause of writing to be the carriage of sound over distance, which necessitated a "deuice . . . to serue the eie afar of, by the mean of letters, as natur did satisfie the ear at hand by benefit of speche" (1925:72). Writing, therefore, is the "aspectable figur of . . . an audible sound," but, as we shall see in the allegory, there is a distinction made between an "aspectable figur" and Hart's painted image of voice (73). Sound begins Mulcaster's allegory as king of the "scriueners prouince," but it soon becomes apparent that his position is contingent on the agreement of the province's magistrates, who, upon observing the imperfections in writing that have resulted from Sound's absolute rule, decide to attenuate his power through the creation of an oligarchy (71). Now Sound must share his rule with Custom and Reason, a triumvirate that succeeds in bringing a degree of stability to writing, though it infuriates the dethroned "Tarquinius" (71) that is Sound: "the fellow is passionat, in autoritie tyrannous, in aw timorous" (75).¹⁴ Further stability is added when the magistrates assign a notary, Art, to record and therefore fix the rules for spelling that have been determined by Sound, Custom, and Reason. It is Mulcaster's conception of custom that really sets his orthography apart from those of Smith, Hart, and Bullokar, for "theie rate at custom as a vile corrupter" and, in "their desire of redresse, theie appeall to sound, as the onelie souerain, and surest leader in the gouernment of writing; & fly to innouation, as the onelie mean, to reform all errors, that be in our writing" (92-93). But, as Mulcaster explains, custom "is not that which men do or speak commonlie . . . but onelie that, which is grounded at the first, upon the best and fittest reason, and is therefore to be used, bycause it is the fittest" (80). Because language is shaped by usage or

¹⁴ Given the terms and notions used by Mulcaster to delineate his province of writing, it is hardly surprising to find readings of the allegory that situate Mulcaster's political views within a republican framework (see O'Neill 1997). However, as will become evident, my reading of Sound's place in the *Elementarie* necessarily complicates any attempt to align Mulcaster to a specific republican or monarchist viewpoint.

custom, it cannot be altered by decree; furthermore, custom loosens the supposed isomorphic connection between sound and “aspectable figur” asserted by Thomas Smith and his protégés: “for what likenesse or what affinitie hath the form of anie letter in his own nature, to answer the force or sound in mans voice?” (73). In fact, as Mulcaster declares, “letters ca[n] expresse sou[n]ds withall their ioyns & properties, no fuller then the pe[n]cill ca[n] the form & lineame[n]ts of the face, whose praise is not life but likenesse” (110).

On the surface, Mulcaster’s allegory seems fairly straightforward: an oral past represented by Sound’s monarchy is gradually replaced by a written culture in which Art, according to the advice of Reason and Custom, fixes language into visual and spatial units. Goldberg, however, has rightly pointed out several problems with this scenario. In the first place, it is apparent that every phase in the transition from sound to writing is “ratified by writing; there is writing before writing” (1990:35). Sound’s power, as I have noted above, depends from the start on the consent of the province’s magistrates, who are quite clearly literate—here they are installing Sound as their governor: “whereunto theie subscribed their names, set to their seals the daie and year, when their consent past” (Mulcaster 1925:73). There is “no pristine orality,” asserts Goldberg, and indeed, for Mulcaster, there is “nothing but writing, and the writing he would institute is ideally fixed” (1990:21, 36). This transfer of “an originary value from a secondary place” in the allegory follows, according to Goldberg, the general pattern of Mulcaster’s pedagogical reforms (30). In other words, the displacement of reading by writing in the sequence of Mulcaster’s curriculum is replicated in his account of the origins of writing, which, in turn, designates the “impossibility of describing ‘mere’ nature without having already assumed ‘perfect’ nature” (34). Confirmation of this account seems to arrive in Mulcaster’s advice for the “choice of wits allyed naturallie to learning” (1925:13); only those children who display certain characteristics (that is, marks or inscriptions that the master reads for signs of aptitude) will be chosen. A well-inscribed boy is the first necessary step in re-inscribing him, because, as Mulcaster translates Plato, “the stamp is then best fashioned, and entreth deapest, wherewith ye mean to mark him, and the sequele will be such, as the foretrain shall lead” (25-26).

However, I read the *Elementarie*—and especially the allegory of Sound—as positing an ideal world of writing that is threatened by orality.¹⁵ Goldberg claims that “writing is the troubling element in the elementary” (1990:29), but when the Province of Writing (putatively also the province of the *Elementarie*) decides to begin its tumultuous relationship with Sound, Mulcaster actually divulges the opposite scenario: Sound, not writing, is the troubling element in the *Elementarie*. The conditions of a pristine orality are not fully outlined in the *Elementarie*, since Mulcaster’s interests lie rather with the dispensation of Sound in the scrivener’s province, and despite the best efforts of the magistrates (and Mulcaster) to delimit Sound’s power, this tyrant persists surreptitiously throughout the *Elementarie*. In fact, he slips out of his subjugation in moments that offer telling insights into Mulcaster’s idea of writing as divorced from sound and yet wholly occupied with its concerns: “yet both the letters, and even sound himself, must be ruled by them, which both sound letters, and utter sounds” (1925:105-06). “[E]rror and misuse” are “sounds principal friend,” but still the pen must register “the argument of reason, custom, and

¹⁵ A similar reading of the *Elementarie* is offered by Hinchliffe 1994.

sound” (116). The idea of an ideal written past under threat from orality is arguably a somewhat ingrained notion in the Renaissance (despite the often overt references to speech as primary and personal), and one that is manifest in the doomed experiments with quantitative verse in English carried out by Sidney, Spenser, and Campion; indeed, their failure can be explained partially by the fact that quantities had “ceased to be a property of the spoken [Latin] language” since at least the fifth century (Attridge 1974:21). But there are other projects at whose roots exist a distrust, or at least ambivalence about sound or speech in relation to the perfection of writing. Neil Rhodes has found just such a project in *Hamlet*: “As it rejects the world of speech, performance, and the media as unstable and inauthentic, the play, through its different versions and through the meditations of its central character, seems to search for a new authenticity in the concepts of a unified inner self and a stable, written text” (2004:44). To a great extent, it is this attitude that impels sixteenth-century English orthographies. For Elizabethans, English was “learned mainly as a spoken language . . . the uncertain orthography of which would have made it difficult to think of in primarily written terms,” whereas Latin “was a language which obeyed fixed rules of spelling and grammar (and hence a much more perfect language than English)” (Attridge 1974:76). Yet this pristine world of written Latin was under perpetual threat by English, since, as Halpern notes, the “speaking of Latin in schools—presumably the epitome of the Erasmian method—came under criticism because it produced bad habits of expression” (1991:31; see Simon 1966:89-90). In trying to teach grammar through “conversing and consorting with those who speak correctly” (McGregor 1978:669), Erasmus unintentionally allowed for the “linguistic properties of the vernaculars” to contaminate the writing and speaking of Latin (Halpern 1991:31-32).

One of the reasons that Erasmus, Smith, and Cheke wanted to excavate the ancient pronunciation of Greek and Latin was because it was being spoken with English voices.¹⁶ The path to recovering these original sounds meant, paradoxically, placing sound in the position of an obstacle, while simultaneously giving texts the prominent or ideal role of guide in relation to sound; this helps to explain why an English phonetic alphabet emerges as a legacy of these men. For Smith, Hart, and Bullokar, then, their phonemic reforms, rather than privileging sound, actually make it a prisoner to an ideally fixed character. And, conversely, it is Mulcaster’s “Tarquinius” Sound, so beset upon by the scrivener’s magistrates, who emerges from sixteenth-century orthographies as conversant with the letter rather than subject to it. Letters are thus “certaine in their most vncertaintie,” and “tho one letter be vsed in diuerse naie, in co[n]trarie sounds: or soundish effects, ye canot auoid it by anie change that wilbe liked, seing no one else hath bene liked hitherto, but this which we vse, which custom doth allow” (1925:110). Under these conditions, Mulcaster’s treatment of Z is telling, particularly with respect to the letter’s proliferation in the orthographies of Hart and Bullokar. That is, even though Z is “much heard,” he is yet made subordinate to S, “which is becom lieutenant generall to z, as gase, amase, rasur, where z, is heard, but, s, sene” (136). Sound, for Z anyway, has no bearing on its usage in an

¹⁶ Derek Attridge discusses the Elizabethan pronunciation of Latin in his *Well-weighed Syllables* (1974:21-29).

orthography, since custom has seen fit to use the written S for the [z] of Z.¹⁷ The empowerment of sound thus relies upon its association with the bodies that produce it: “so likewise in the voice, tho in euerie one it passe thorough, by one mouth, one throte, one tung, one fense of tethe, and so furth, yet is it as different in euerie one, euen for giuing the sound, by reason of som diuersitie in the vocall instruments, as the faces be different in resembling like form” (77). A universal alphabet, in other words, ignores the fact that, no matter what letter is given, the vagaries of sound—whether contributed by geography, class, gender, age, or physiology—will mediate its pronunciation.¹⁸

Mulcaster experienced this particular aspect of sound's tyranny after only his first year in charge at Merchant Taylors' School. In August 1562, Merchant Taylors' entertained its first external examiners, who came to the conclusion that, although the pupils had “moche p[ro]fyted” under Mulcaster's care, too many “northern” accents were heard, and therefore the ushers and students “did not pronounce so well as those that be brought up in the scholes of the south p.tes of the realme” (Draper 1962:13).¹⁹ The students, of course, were not from Cumbria, but the master was. Mulcaster (born in Carlisle) had preferred on the day of the examination to “lay sick in his bed,” but in a significant way he was very much present during this auspicious occasion. In making Cicero speak, the children could only revive Mulcaster speaking Cicero. The training of delivery, then, was always liable to disturb the notion of a stable and unified text (Latin in this case), especially since it was a task left completely to the discretion of the master. Inevitably so, it would seem: the sound effects so crucial to delivery—accent, pitch, volume, rhythm, and the various physiological components that govern them all—by their very nature resist textualization, requiring instead a body-to-body pedagogical trajectory. Hence, we can understand Erasmus' advice regarding “conversing and consorting” as only tangentially relevant to grammar, of ultimate importance to rhetoric, but affecting both; or, as de Certeau might put it, the “problematics of enunciation” created with the rules or “propriety” of grammar an “interplay of forces” (1984:39).

Sound and writing were both unstable entities in the Renaissance, and a unidirectional master-servant relationship was not always in evidence. In the classroom, for example, the

¹⁷ Importantly, Z remains in Mulcaster's orthography because of both visual and aural exigencies, whereas in previous orthographies a sound that was already being served by two letters would have resulted in the expulsion of one letter. The main reason for keeping Z, according to Mulcaster, is that it provides an indication of a word's derivation from a foreign language, as in the medieval Latin and Old French etymology of “azur” (1925:136). Other letters, previously vilified, are restored by Mulcaster to their usual places. E, for example, cruelly used by Baret, is in the *Elementarie* “a letter of maruellous vse in the writing of our tung,” and, even when silent, is given the job of “qualifying” the sounds of preceding vowels and consonants (123).

¹⁸ The threat of puberty for a Renaissance boy actor's voice, for example, has been discussed by Gina Bloom (2007:21-65). Smith (1999) discusses more generally “brain-to-tongue-to-air-to-ear-to-brain communication, with a special interest in the middle part of that chain” (18-19).

¹⁹ The details of this visitation are recorded in the Minutes of Court for Merchant Taylors' Hall, August 16, 1562. Sir William Harper (Lord Mayor) presided over this inaugural examination, which was carried out by Edmund Grindal (then Bishop of London), David Whitehead (puritan preacher), James Calhill (then Canon of Christ Church), and Thomas Watts (then Archdeacon of Middlesex). Visitations like this one would last from early morning until dinner (which was provided for the examiners by the Merchant Taylors' Company in the Hall), and students were judged primarily on their oral performances.

transmission of a text from the master's mouth to the pen of the child was always under threat from his pronunciation, as Fred Schurink's discovery of an Elizabethan grammar school exercise book shows. The types of "shortcomings in spelling and punctuation" in the boy's exercise book indicate, as Schurink suggests, "either that he was taking down a dictation . . . or that he had heard or seen the words before and was writing them down as he sounded them out to himself" (2003:189). "If you pronounce the word false," warns a near-contemporary of Mulcaster's, "which you would haue your childe to spell, hee spelleth it false: for hee spelleth according as it is pronounced to him, or as he vseth to pronounce" (Brinsley 1612:D1r). Text and voice work together here to create an unstable written artifact as much faulted by the voice as it is by the text that supposedly reconstitutes the voice. At times, as when Roger Ascham declares in 1545 that "no man can wryte a thing so earnestlye, as whan it is spoken" (1904:27), we are faced with the widely held Renaissance commonplace that speech preceded and ruled writing, but, at a practical level anyway, writing is increasingly viewed as a guide to speech, as when Erasmus notes that "nowadays we acquire our way of speaking not from the community at large but from the writings of learned men, so usage does not have the same prescriptive power" (Knott 1978:312-13). However, in another related and burgeoning sphere of linguistic media, the idea that printed books could lend to writing an aura of legitimization is responsible for the complaint that "every red-nosed rhymester is an author, every drunken man's dream is a book" (R.W. 1591:A3v). A similar sentiment is expressed by Mulcaster when he suggests that, if Sound were to rule the pen, "everie mans brain" would be "everie ma[n]s book, and evrie priuat conceit a particular print" (1925:115-16). Bruce Smith observes in this passage a sign that "book-making technology has been thoroughly acculturated to orality, if not orality to book-making technology" (1999:127). Certainly, it is a ubiquitous feature of Renaissance texts that they conceived of themselves as speech. Metaphors of sound, for example, occur throughout the *Elementarie*, whereby the text is conceived as uttered or spoken; here Mulcaster refers to the points made in *Positions*: "being once handled there desire no further speche in any other treatis" (1925:1); and later, when referring to ancient authors: "But will ye hear the writers them selues speak?" (9); even the orthography, which supposedly deals in dead letters, speaks: "But the ortografie calls for me" (68)—its final chapter is titled "The Peroration," the formal rhetorical term for the conclusion of a speech. Barker has noted the various ways in which Mulcaster's antecedent work, *Positions*, is "a showpiece of studied rhetoric," and its "use of the figures of sound" lends a "closeness" to its style (in Mulcaster 1994:xlix-l); many of his observations may extend to the style of the *Elementarie* as well. Even in a text that claims to make writing primary—by its choice of form, topical matter, curricular order, and, as Goldberg has highlighted, in its "textual effects"—sound reverberates through its fixed characters.²⁰

But sound persists in the *Elementarie* in other ways as well, and here I must return one final time to the example of the letter Z. Despite his claims regarding the "heard" Z and its subjugation to the "sene" S, the sound of Z creates a variety of problems for Mulcaster; in fact, its sound means Mulcaster must adjust the appearance and frequency of various other letters. One of the justifications for keeping the letter C (deposed by Baret), for example, is its

²⁰ Throughout the *Elementarie*, Mulcaster puns on every possible meaning of "sound" (nautical, acoustic, linguistic, exploratory, ontological, as noun, verb, adverb, or adjective), usually in connection with students. Typical is the statement "he that is soundlie learned, will streight waie sound a scholer" (1925:288).

usefulness in distinguishing between an S that sounds [s], and an S that sounds [z], as in the different pronunciations of “amase” and “ace” (1925:141); the use of the double S in spelling, as in “glasse,” must be used to ensure the speaker does not mistakenly say “gla[z]e” (since S was also used for [z]) (144); and the silent E (castrated by Baret) is kept in Mulcaster’s alphabet in part because it tells speakers to pronounce the S in certain words as [z], as one should in E-ending words like “cruse, excuse, abuse” (124). Z, then, continues to hold sway over spelling not because of or with its visual character, but rather because of its sound—the presence of C, S, or E occurs, in many instances, to meet the exigencies of [z]. Mulcaster’s orthography continually oscillates in this manner between a conception of letters as completely divorced from sound, and one that finds sound and sight interacting (not always in conflict), as the effects of Z’s guerilla tactics with its lieutenant general S suggest.

So far, I have tried to show that the notion of a pristine orality is not always self-evident in the *Elementarie*, though neither is an ideal written world, despite the perfection and permanence it promises for language; both sound and sight mediate each other. In Mulcaster’s argument, then, orality and literacy can function in an adiaphoristic capacity, one contingent upon the various demands placed on sound and writing through the course of the treatise. Joel Altman’s thesis in *The Tudor Play of Mind* (1978), namely that Renaissance minds were taught to argue habitually on both sides of the question (*in utramque partem*), is pertinent here, since it allows me to see, along with Rebecca Bushnell, “where one tendency of early modern humanist pedagogy always allowed for the realization of an opposite one, without undermining or effacing itself in turn” (Bushnell 1996:19). Though the pervasiveness of this ambivalence can risk blanket statements about Renaissance culture, it seems particularly relevant to Mulcaster’s attitude about sound and writing, and, hence, I would argue to his conception of a child’s nature. And here we return to Goldberg’s statement that “what is, what existence is, literally, is writing” (1990:21). For the remainder of this paper, I would like to show that, in the *Elementarie*, something more than just writing creates speech.

The mind-as-wax analogy inherited by Mulcaster—from Plato, Plutarch, Quintilian, and Erasmus, among many others—informs his conception of a child’s nature, and it is indeed the act of stamping or engraving this wax that governs the metaphorical relationship between education and children (Mulcaster 1925:25-26). Questions remain, however, as to the nature of these inscriptions, and especially, their presence prior to the (re)inscription process of education. Quintilian thinks of these wax inscriptions as spoken, especially in connection with the art of memory (11.2.21 and 33); in connection with Christianity, Thomas More, for example, proclaims that God, just as he did for the apostles before they wrote their books, “is at his liberty to geue his word in to hys chyrch euen yet at thys daye, by hys owne mouthe, thorow thinspyracyon of hys holy spyryte,” so that preaching will “wryte it i[n] ye hertes of ye herers” (1533:K3r-v). This conflation of sound and sight is also apparent in the *Elementarie* when Mulcaster advises parents to be wary of their voices in their home lest “vncomelie hearings” make the “pliable minde . . . vnwiselie writhen to a disfigured shape” (1925:25). The inevitable advice given in pedagogical treatises from classical times to the Renaissance is that the child’s first caregiver must be chosen with care, since, as Mulcaster writes in *Positions*, children are apt to imitate “the maners and conditions of the nurse, with the fines or rudenes of her speeche;” similar justifications are

provided for the counsel to choose good playmates for children (1994:28). This last bit of advice especially takes us from the scrivener's province to the province of delivery, where language (spoken and written) represents only one side of the wax tablet.

In the reality asserted by the *Elementarie*, there are at least two provinces, for it is clear that Sound is a foreigner drafted into the scrivener's province by its magistrates. Sound's province is one where the "throthe," "tung," and "fense of tethe" may live in peace, since their "diuersitie . . . hinder not the deliuerie of euerie mans minde;" only they must be kept away from "euerie mans pen in setting down of letters" (1925:77). The mistake made by the magistrates (and Mulcaster is clear that it is "by their own commission" that the magistrates "ouercharged" Sound [74]) is to allow a non-native of the written/writing province to rule what he could not by virtue of his disposition command. If it is true, as Goldberg suggests, that Mulcaster is unable "to lay out the course of education at its most elementary level," it is not "because of the troubling place that writing occupies in its program," but rather, I would argue, the troubling place that delivery occupies in its program (1990:7). That is, even before Mulcaster supplants reading with writing in his program of reading, writing, drawing, singing, and musical instruments, he has in fact supplanted the founding principle of this course (whether it be reading or writing) with exercise. Mulcaster's curriculum actually begins with a list of recommended physical exercises in *Positions*, the first of which is "Of lowd speaking" (Ch. 10). Before "speaking," we have its volume, "lowd;" before its use in "utterance of speech," it serves "for the deliuerie of voice" (1994:65). It is to this regime that the *Elementarie* declares itself bound for performance (1925:1), and in spite of Mulcaster's claims in Chapter 5 of *Positions*—that he will deal first with reading, then writing, and so on—he begins Chapter 6 with an explanation for his inclusion of athletics in a school curriculum, followed by several chapters outlining specific exercises and their usefulness.

As many other scholars have noted, Mulcaster's enthusiasm for physical exercise is based on its role in preparation for the fifth part of rhetoric, *pronuntiatio et actio* (Barker in Mulcaster 1994:xxiii; Rhodes 2004:23; Potter 2004:147; Bloom 2007:31-39).²¹ The tradition connecting athletics with speech delivery originates in classical Greek and Roman educational practice, and is set out most explicitly in Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* (1.11). No anecdote is more often quoted in defense of the well-exercised orator than Plutarch's account of Demosthenes, who remedied his speech faults through a variety of physical tasks.²² Mulcaster, like many of his contemporaries, imagined Demosthenes as the ideal orator (1925:21), and he appears in *Positions* when Mulcaster justifies the usefulness of walking: "Demosthenes strengthened his

²¹ For the course of his physical education program, Mulcaster borrows heavily from Girolamo Mercuriale's *De arte gymnastica libri sex* (1569), some important background for which is provided by Barker (in Mulcaster 1994:xxii-viii). There is no proof that Mulcaster ever implemented his regime, but, "unlike most earlier and contemporary writers, who consider sports to be extra-curricular in that they are normally unconnected with the formal academic curriculum, Mulcaster wishes them to be brought within the school" (xxii-iii). As well, although the statutes for Merchant Taylors' School were nearly an identical copy of John Colet's statutes for St. Paul's, there was a significant addition made by the Merchant Taylors' Company that no "tennis-play" would be allowed, as it was "but foolish babling & losse of tyme." The relationship between Mulcaster and his employers was nearly always strained, so the amendment may be understood in light of the Company's desire to quell Mulcaster's proclivities to recreation—there was, after all, "a tennis court in Suffolk Lane," near the school (Draper 1962:247).

²² See Plutarch's "Demosthenes" in his *Lives* 1958:VII, 1-79 and Quintilian 11.3.54 and 130.

voice by it, pronouncing his orations aloud, as he walked up against the hill" (1994:93). But there are other activities called "exercises" by Mulcaster that pertain more directly to sound (even if they do not necessarily fit with a modern notion of athletics). "Of lowd speaking," for example, is "dwelt" on longer than any other exercise "bycause it is both the first in rancke, and the best meane to make good pronouncing of any thing" (68). Sound volume is in fact the chief concern of the first three of Mulcaster's exercises: "Of lowd speaking" (65-68), "Of loude singing" (68-69), and "Of loude and soft reading" (69-71); the fourth exercise, "Of much talking and silence" (71-72), pertains to speed of delivery and the strength of the tongue; and the fifth, "Of laughing, and weeping" (72-76), with expressing emotions, one of the most important activities of delivery. Furthermore, exercises that are not related ostensibly to sound are nevertheless validated in part because of their relationship to delivery: walking, for instance, will help to "deliver . . . long periodes" (93), and running, especially done while holding the breath, will prevent the "distorsion or writhing of the mouth" (97). Even the Galenic medicine that justifies all eighteen of Mulcaster's exercises is pertinent to sound: "The thing that maketh the voice bigge," insists Levinus Lemnius, "is partlye the wydenes of the breast and vocall Artery, and partly the inwarde or internall heate, from whence proceedeth the earnest affections, vehemente motions, and feruent desyers of the mynde" (1576:F5v). So, although these recommendations have language as their end, by focusing on non-linguistic qualities such as volume, rhythm, tone, and breathing, they tend always to de-contextualize sound from speech. Sound, in effect, trains sound: what is being spoken, sung, or read in the first three exercises, for example, is of secondary importance to the qualities of volume attached to it. Yet not only for oratory, but for learning in general, exercise will make a "dry, strong, hard, and therefore a long lasting body: and by the favour therof to have an active, sharp, wise and therwith all a well learned soule" (Mulcaster 1994:34). If Mulcaster's curriculum of physical education tells us anything, it is that perfect nature is not assumed before an inscription occurs; sound, divorced from language, can alter both imperfect and perfect nature through training (modulating sound) to render it amenable to the act of stamping or engrafting. Something other than writing creates speech, and the phrase "allyed naturallie to learning" must be held loosely.

It is with this politics of pedagogy in mind that we can understand Mulcaster's claim in the *Elementarie's* dedicatory epistle to Leicester that he has "sou[n]ded the thing by the depth of our tung, and planted [his] rules vpon our ordinarie custom" (1925:Epistle). A tyrant sound is exercised throughout the *Elementarie*, and, as the author is at pains to declare, the work presents an orthography that cannot be divorced from *Positions*: "my former book, which I name Positions, did carie me on to promis it, and binds me to perform it. But for the better linking of this book to that, seing this is nothing else, but the performing of one pece . . ." (1925:1). The very premise upon which his curriculum of athletics is based turns out, in fact, to be the metaphor that guides Mulcaster's *Elementarie*, for this treatise is said to act in the same exemplary capacity as Demosthenes, Theodorus, and Roscius (20-23)—figures, in other words, all famous for their skill in delivery, or their ability to train orators in the skills of delivery: "the infinite commoditie of a good and perfect Elementarie, is as trew in the train to learning, as either Catoes was in husbandrie, or Demosthenes his in oratorie" (21). Therefore, by making the demands of the *Elementarie* analogous with the demands of Demosthenes, Mulcaster highlights

nurture rather than nature, for, as Plutarch records, Demosthenes was not naturally disposed to learning, and only through exercise was he able to succeed: “it was thought that he was not a man of good natural parts, but that his ability and power were the product of toil” (Perrin 1958:VII, 19). This is why, in spite of the displacement of reading by writing that Goldberg suggests, Mulcaster puns in the *Elementarie* on one inescapable feature of its birth: “And not to leaue exercise quite vntouched, seing it is mere Elementarie” (1925:28).²³ Just as the *Elementarie* cannot be taken in isolation from *Positions*, so writing—and an inscribed nature—can never quite escape from a sound that nurtures even an imperfect nature.

Like *Positions*, the *Elementarie* does not allege to embark on actual practice (not even on methods for teaching writing to children), but rather to “entreat . . . of certain generall considerations, which concern the hole Elementarie” (1925:Epistle), so that both sound and writing form the foundations of reading, writing, drawing, and music. (Or, at least the destabilization of the mere idea of “foundation” is one that occurs as much because of sound as writing, since both seem to undermine the curricular sequence that Mulcaster first asserts in *Positions*, Chapter 5.) Nonetheless, it bears mentioning that the fullest account we have of pedagogical practice for Mulcaster is his physical exercise regime, which describes the benefit of each activity, its relation to the curriculum, how often and when to embark on exercises in a school day, and how to adjust it to suit the needs of each child depending on their age, weight, height, inclination, how much they have eaten, and so forth. It is irrelevant to this paper whether Spenser, for example, ran up and down Suffolk Lane with held breath, but it is important to point out that the politics that lurk within the curricular reforms of *Positions* (as well as, then, the *Elementarie* that “performs” it) are such that brutality and inequality are not to be assumed as universal or absolute.²⁴ An exercise regime designed to ease the boredom of sitting still for eight hours a day,²⁵ to purposefully engage with juvenile interests (ball games, archery, spinning tops, fencing), to train the voice (for drama and oratory), to keep the humors appropriately balanced, and to make wits “allyed” to learning (rather than simply find such wits), includes dimensions of play and discipline, agency and inscription. It is this regime that is insinuated within every step

²³ Erasmus imagines a similar trajectory in *De pueris instituendis* when he notes that English parents are known to teach children archery before the alphabet; however, he admires the ingenuity of one particular parent who combined exercise and language education by inscribing letters on his son’s bow (Verstraete 1985:339). Archery is one of the physical exercises recommended by Mulcaster (1994:106-09), his particular interest in this sport owing perhaps to his involvement in Prince Arthur’s Knights, a fellowship of archery enthusiasts “in and about the citie of London” (108). Elizabeth I’s tutor, Roger Ascham, wrote a treatise on archery called *Toxophilus* (1545).

²⁴ With respect to class and ethnicity, there was obviously a great deal of inequality in terms of demographic representation in Elizabethan schools, but in the case of Merchant Taylors’ School, the statutes read as follows: “There shallbe taught in the said schoole children of all nations & countryes indifferently” (Draper 1962:246). Mulcaster’s school also stipulated that the master “shall not refuse to take, receave, and teach in the said schoole freely one hundredth schollers, parcell of the said number of two hundredth & ffyfty schollers, being poore men’s sonnes” (*ibid.*:243).

²⁵ “Wherfore as stilnesse hath her direction by order in schooles, so must stirring be directed by well appointed exercise. And as quiet sitting helpes ill humors to breede, and burden the bodie: so must much stirring make a waie to discharge the one, and to disburden the other. Both which helpes, as I most earnestly require at the parent, and maisters hand” (Mulcaster 1994:35). The statutes of Merchant Taylors’ School specify that the “children shall come to the schoole in the mornyng at seaven of the clock both winter & somer, & tarry there until eleaven, and returne againe at one of the clock, and departe at five” (Draper 1962:246).

of the *Elementarie*'s province of writing. To be sure, even the few attempts to dissociate his orthography from the sounding body of *Positions* are marked by failure; Mulcaster, for instance, is unable to distance himself from the importance of "nurture" that governs *Positions*, so that the impulse to assume "perfect" nature is frequently thwarted (1925:27):

Neither is the question at this time of anie naturall inclination, but of artificiall helps, and those not for the bodie, which point is for Gymnastik and exercise of the bodie, but onelie for the minde, tho wrought by the bodie, which is for these principles, and the Elementarie learning: I saie therefore that these fiue principles . . . which make this hole Elementarie, besides exercise, which is Elementarie to, tho handled elsewhere, be the onelie artificiall means to make a minde capable of all the best qualities, which ar to be engrafted in the minde, tho to be executed by the bodie.

Children, therefore, were signs to be read, sounds to be heard, but they were also bodies that could shape themselves and be shaped in order to "frame their tender wits for the matter of their learning" (1925:4), an affirmation of the Aristotelian "common sympathie" between "soule and bodie" (1994:51). A pedagogy that supposedly sought only for those "allyed naturallie to learning" is thus continually disrupted by the fluid body—with its "throate," "tung," and "fense of tethe"—that always comes "bound" with the *Elementarie*, ready to toil like the unnaturally allied Demosthenes (13).

The idea that "what is, what existence is, literally, is writing" is related to the now common assumption that language constitutes all that we are, one that has been mapped on to literary projects for some time (Goldberg 1990:21). Agency thus becomes in all respects a myth, a convenient fiction with which we protect ourselves from the rather inconvenient truth that we are really just machines constructed by linguistic epistemes. "Orality" in this myth has generally tended to stand in for subjectivity, presence, movement; "literacy" for objectivity, absence, fixity.²⁶ However, in this analysis sound and writing overlap, and the opposition of orality and literacy breaks down to reveal a process of mutual mediation and construction, such that metaphors of inscription (and their attendant ontological effects of absolute determination) do not preclude agency and presence. Thus, despite Mulcaster's best efforts to delimit sound in detailing his methods of spelling, this tyrant persists within its proscribed medium in ways analogous to a "selfhood" within, as de Certeau puts it, "a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power" (1984:37). Furthermore, the *Elementarie* gives license to this "selfhood" by declaring its subjection to *Positions*, a work that cannot adhere to its promised course of study without first introducing into the curriculum a series of non-linguistic forms of expression (ones that turn out to be crucial to the construction of a nature able to receive and perform learning). These non-linguistic exercises of volume, tone, and rhythm are therefore

²⁶ Bruce Smith's *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England* is concerned with the "existential moment" of "every act of speaking and listening," a moment that "affirms (1) the selfhood of the speaker, (2) the selfhood of the listener, and (3) the culture that conjoins them" (1999:21-22; paraphrasing from Zumthor 1990:60-63). Smith's first chapter provides useful background to the issue of orality and literacy in terms of presence or agency, most interestingly when he states, along with Harold Love, that presence "is what a given culture *takes to be presence*" (1999:12; see Love 1993:144).

linked inexorably to agency, since they bring to Mulcaster's orthography the same attribute (sound) that threatens the fixity and permanence of his spelling. What this teacher legitimates, then, is a space for children to be heard, even those children not naturally disposed to education, and even within an ideological framework that may want its reality seen and not heard. This is the story of a tactful, sounding [z] interacting meaningfully with its programmed, visual S.

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