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## Cuttlefish Rhetoric

*Abstract:* I explain why Thomas Wilson likens to cuttlefish those orators who rely too heavily on inkhorn terms. For the sake of comparison, I also discuss how Renaissance critics use other creaturely metaphors—eels, snakes, devils, and oxen—to impugn bad rhetoricians. My underlying purpose is to reveal Wilson's neglected religious motives for rejecting inkpot words and, by extension, some of the key religious motives informing the period's language controversies.

Keywords: cuttlefish, Thomas Wilson, inkhorn words, Reformation rhetoric, Renaissance rhetoric, satire, theology, bestiary, wet eels, Protestantism

I n *The Arte of Rhetorique* (1553), Thomas Wilson lampoons orators who rely too heavily on inkhorn words, those foreign borrowings into English often deemed unnecessary or affected, or both. His aim is to improve the vernacular, and to this end he targets a motley cast of characters known for their inkpot tendencies: lawyers, mystics, courtiers, overstuffed pedants, drunken country mayors, and Italianated Englishmen, among others, all of whom produce in Wilson an impatience toward pretense. But the most memorable example in Wilson's satire arrives in the form of a hapless Lincolnshire minister who tries to secure a parsonage from a duke. The parson writes a now-infamous letter, which is too burdensome to repeat in full. The opening gambit, wherein the pastor flatters the duke, gives us the idea:

Pondering, expending, and revolving with my selfe, your ingent affabilitie, and ingenious capacity for mundane affaires: I cannot but celebrate, & extol your magnificent dexteritie above all other. For how could you have adepted such illustrate prerogative, and dominicall

superioritie, if the fecunditie of your ingenie had not been so fertile and wonderfull pregnant.<sup>1</sup>

Wilson insists that it is real, but I suspect that he discovered the letter much like Søren Kierkegaard “discovered” the papers of *Either/Or* in a hidden compartment of an old *escritoire*.<sup>2</sup> Regardless, he uses the ridiculous dispatch to a good effect: abusing grandiloquence. Pathos becomes bathos, and the parson’s rhetoric collapses under the weight of its own embellishment.

The crux of Wilson’s inkhorn section, however, comes moments earlier in one seemingly straightforward remark: “I know them that thinke *Rhetorique* to stande wholie upon darke wordes, and hee that can catche an ynke horne terme by the taile, him they coumpt to be a fine Englisheman, and a good *Rhetorician*.”<sup>3</sup> Not only are inkhorn terms regularly used, Wilson complains, but they are also regularly taken as evidence of wit by educated readers, or half-educated readers, as the case might be—to his indignation. The sentence makes the point, but it also has an oddity about it, a strange metaphor that raises a question. What creature is being caught by the tail in Wilson’s inkhorn-term-by-the-tail analogy? Nobody has answered this question, and perhaps nobody has asked it. All we know for sure is that the creature has a tail and, too, that it is related to the problem of inkhorn writing. In an effort not to be mysterious about my conclusions, let me say upfront that I believe the animal in question is the cuttlefish, not the Loch Ness Monster, nor one of several other tailed creatures that populate Wilson’s milieu and regularly appear in Renaissance discussions of eloquence: snakes, eels, devils, oxen, mermaids, herring, and foxes, to name a few. The cuttlefish is the most likely, in part because of its ink-squirting nature, a perfect analogue for the inkhorn writer, in part because of its role in the rogue’s bestiary, that is, the dissembling cuttlefish, the Machiavellian cephalopod, and in part because of its function as a nickname of opprobrium for Aristotle and the horde of peripatetic philosophers who followed, especially the scholastics. For all of these reasons, the cuttle fits best, but strong cases should also be made for other tailed candidates, by way of examining the merits and possible weaknesses of the cuttlefish argument.

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<sup>1</sup>Wilson, *Arte of Rhetorique* (1560), ed. G.H. Mair (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1909), 163. For a modernized version of the letter, see Peter Medine’s edition of Wilson’s *Art of Rhetoric* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 189.

<sup>2</sup>Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part 1*, ed. and trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 6.

<sup>3</sup>Wilson, *Arte of Rhetorique*, 162.

More broadly, what does it matter if Wilson uses a cryptic metaphor? How much depends upon the cuttlefish? More than it might seem, I submit. Once identified, the creature shapes the tone of an often-discussed and particularly important passage in English Renaissance rhetoric.<sup>4</sup> If a cuttlefish, then the inkhorn section has more to say about English reform, the sacrament of communion, and the sin of rhetorical pride than critics presently suggest. That is, a cuttlefish reference most clearly brings to the surface Wilson's neglected religious motives for rejecting the inkpot and, by extension, some of the key religious motives underpinning what R.F. Jones described as the inkhorn controversies of the sixteenth century, out of which modern English writing took shape.<sup>5</sup>

#### ALTERNATIVES TO THE CUTTLEFISH

What else could the tailed creature be, if not a cuttle? There are good alternatives, some better than others and several worth reviewing, if for no other reason than to rehearse legitimate counterarguments before we take up the evidence favoring the cuttlefish.

The wet eel, for example, is a most interesting possibility for the creature behind Wilson's catch-a-word-by-the-tail metaphor. It is the subject of a commonplace expression in sixteenth-century England: "hold a wet eel by the tail," or some variation thereof. The turn of phrase appears in Erasmus's *Adages* (1508) and also finds its way into John Haywood's *Dialogue Containing All of the Proverbs in the English Tongue* (1546), which, as the title suggests, is a work stitched together out of medieval and Renaissance maxims.<sup>6</sup> The verses are designed more to teach than to delight:

Hir promise of frendshyp, for any avayle,  
Is as sure to holde, as an eele by the tayle.

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<sup>4</sup>See, for example, Jenny Mann, *Figuring Vernacular Eloquence in Shakespeare's England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 179–82; Wolfgang G. Müller, "Thomas Wilson's *Art of Rhetoric*, George Puttenham's *Art of English Poesy*, and the Search for Vernacular Eloquence," in Mike Pincombe and Cathy Shrank, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Literature: 1485–1603* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 307–22; Cathy Shrank, *Writing the Nation in Reformation England, 1530–1580* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 182–87; Thomas Sloane, *On the Contrary* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 226–29; Paula Blank, *Dialects and the Politics of Language in Renaissance Writings* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 41–42.

<sup>5</sup>Jones, *The Triumph of the English Language* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1953), 101–20.

<sup>6</sup>Erasmus, *Adages*, trans. William Watson Barker (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 82.

She is nother fishe nor fleshe nor good red hearyng.  
 She maie doo muche there, and I therby fearyng  
 She wolde spit her venym, thought it not evyll  
 To set vp a candell before the devyll.<sup>7</sup>

William Painter provides another typical example of the metaphor in *The Second Tome of the Palace of Pleasure* (1567), where he describes a Baron who tries to woo a clever woman: "The Baron thinkyng he had caught the Eele by the taile, not well practised in *Cicero* his schoole, ceased not to contrive the [ruse] by makyng hir believe that he was farre in love."<sup>8</sup> The Baron puts on a performance, but, as the story progresses, we discover that he is the one being fooled, which becomes clear when the woman locks him in the prison tower, under the guise of their first rendezvous. She is the one well-practiced "in *Cicero* his school," and the Baron—thinking he had caught a wet eel by the tail—discovers only his bruised vanity. In a light-hearted playlet, Ben Jonson expresses a related idea through the character of "mistress wet-eel-by-the-tail," whose nickname says enough.<sup>9</sup> Finally, a shrewd maxim from Tom Browne's *Amusements* (1700) usefully shows the connection between the slippery eel and the slippery rhetorician: "He that holds a courtier by the hand has a wet eel by the tail."<sup>10</sup>

Might Wilson be thinking of a wet eel when he describes the orator who catches an inkhorn term by the tail? The eel certainly makes sense, perhaps most notably in terms of the inkhorn section's comic aspects. The proto-malaprop characters, in particular, lose control of their words in a way that is entirely consistent with the period's wet eel analogues. When the beggar asks the wealthy passerby for "contrary bishops" instead of "contributions," for example, the sentence begins to undulate, and the intended meaning gets lost in the wake.<sup>11</sup> The same holds true of the townsman and the country mayor. Using the official style, the townsman greets the Cambridge Provost as a "worshipful Pilate" who "keeps a bominable house," which is meant as a compliment.<sup>12</sup> Wilson's diagnosis: "the simple man, being desirous to amend his mother's tongue, showed himself not to be the wisest man that ever spake with tongue."<sup>13</sup> An apt

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<sup>7</sup>Heywood, *A Dialogue Conteynyng the Number in Effect of All the Proverbes in the Englishe Tongue* (London: S.I., 1546), C3.

<sup>8</sup>Painter, *The Second Tome of the Palace of Pleasure* (London: Henry Bynneman, 1567), 302.

<sup>9</sup>Jonson, *The Works: In 9 Volumes*, ed. William Gifford (London: W. Bulmer and Company, 1816), 9.25.

<sup>10</sup>Browne, *Amusements Serious and Comical* (New York: Routledge, 1927), 7.

<sup>11</sup>Wilson, *Rhetorique*, 164.

<sup>12</sup>Wilson, *Rhetorique*, 164.

<sup>13</sup>Wilson, *Rhetorique*, 164.

criticism, underneath which also functions a great inside joke, given that John Cheke, friend to Wilson and champion of the English linguistic reformers, is the provost we are to imagine here—ironically lauded in the language of inkhorn gibberish.<sup>14</sup> The country mayor's rhetoric is similarly undulating in a manner that might easily call to mind the wet eel. In the process of chiding a vagrant and a knave, and while attempting to achieve a rhetorical crescendo, the mayor loses grip of his own dictionary: "Thou ingram and vacation knave, if I take thee anymore within the circumcision of my damnation, I will so corrupt thee that all vacation knaves shall take ilsample by thee."<sup>15</sup> It is difficult to know exactly what the mayor had in mind, but we can be certain that "circumcision" is not the right word. And we can be equally certain that passages such as this one explain in part why Wilson's guidebook had such a large following in sixteenth-century England, beyond the expected reasons of sound instruction and clear prose.<sup>16</sup> Wilson entertains. The book has a spirit of play and satire throughout, including the inkhorn section, where the mayor and Wilson's other proto-malaprop characters seem to foreshadow Shakespeare's Constable Dogberry and Mistress Quickly. The Wilson-as-source-for-Shakespeare thesis is very likely the case, though there is no need to push the argument.<sup>17</sup> It is enough to say that Shakespeare probably knew Wilson's guidebook and probably had Wilson in the room when Quickly jumped from the page and said "honeysuckle" instead of

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<sup>14</sup>Wilson and Cheke are part of what Winthrop Hudson deemed "the Cambridge connection," a group of Cambridge-educated Protestant humanists who pushed for linguistic and religious reforms; the assemblage also includes Thomas Smith, Thomas Hoby, William Cecil, John Ponet, and John Aylmer (*The Cambridge Connection and the Elizabethan Settlement* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1980]). See also John McDiarmid, "Common Consent, *Latinitas*, and the 'Monarchical Republic' in mid-Tudor Humanism," in John McDiarmid, ed., *The Monarchical Republic of Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 55–74; Stephen Alford, *Kingship and Politics in the Reign of Edward VI* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 139–51, 199–203.

<sup>15</sup>Wilson, *Rhetorique*, 164.

<sup>16</sup>In his copy of Quintilian, Gabriel Harvey notes that Wilson's *Rhetorique* is "the daily bread of our common pleaders and discourers" (Virginia Sterne, *Gabriel Harvey: His Life, Marginalia, and Library* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1979], 239). Richard Rainholde describes Wilson's *Rhetorique* as a "learned work" written by one "who in judgment is profound, in wisdom and eloquence most famous" (*Foundacion of Rhetorike* [London: John Kingston, 1563], A3v).

<sup>17</sup>Hardin Craig, "Shakespeare and Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique*," *Studies in Philology* 28 (1931): 618–30. See also T.W. Baldwin's *William Shakespeare's "Small Latine & Lesse Greeke"* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944).

"homicidal," or when Dogberry muddled the difference between "senseless" and "sensible."<sup>18</sup> Such is wet-eel rhetoric.

At the same time, the slippery eel need not be a comic device, which is crucial if it is going to be a legitimate possibility as the creature, given that Wilson also offers serious commentary on inkhorn terms. Grave references to wet-eel rhetoric appear most obviously in Renaissance religious polemics. The Protestant George Joye provides an emblematic example in *The Refutation of the Byshop of Winchester* (1546), where he defends Phillip Melanchthon's educational and rhetorical reforms against Catholicism. In a climax meant to sting, Joye calls the "papist" philosopher "an antichristian apprehender and holder of so sliper an ele by the taile."<sup>19</sup> By Renaissance standards, and our own, this insult hardly seems like a deathblow, but neither is it a nice thing to say. Thomas Bell levels almost exactly the same complaint against the Pope in *The Hunting of the Romish Fox*: "And nevertheless when we have done all that we can, we know no more what to thinke or say of his doctrine, then when we have an Eele by the taile."<sup>20</sup> Like Joye, Bell describes Catholic theology as an unwieldy eel, which leaves at a loss everyone who tries to hold it, and being at a loss in the world of Christian theology is not lightly comical in this scenario. Joye's and Bell's wet eel metaphors should be read as dark comedy, if comedy at all, mainly due to the religious context combined with the strange ontology of the eel itself. Eels were not imagined by Renaissance naturalists to reproduce in the ordinary way, but rather to be animated preternaturally out of the intestines of the earth, the rotting corners of caves. Worse still, the Renaissance folk logicians believed that a woman's strand of hair—if left in murky water for nine days—became an eel. In short, eels were thought to be creepy, and perhaps rightly so. Eels are weird, despite the fact that the famous Roman orator Lucius Crassus kept one as a pet and apparently had great affection for it.<sup>21</sup> He is the exception that proves the rule. By comparing Catholic doctrine to a slippery eel, Joye and Bell invoke this strange atmosphere, which in a darkly comical sense connects Catholic rhetoric to the world of humbug oratory and claptrap, and, in a darker sense still, paints Catholic theology as being full of fury signifying nothing.

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<sup>18</sup>Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part Two*, ed. Sylvan Barnet and Norman Holland (New York: Signet, 2002), 2.1.51; *Much Ado about Nothing*, ed. Sylvan Barnet and David Stevenson (New York: Signet, 1998), 3.3.23.

<sup>19</sup>Joye, *The Refutation of the Byshop of Winchesters Derke Declaration of His False Articles* (London: J. Herford, 1546), 177.

<sup>20</sup>Bell, *Hunting of the Romish Fox* (London: Richard Bradocke, 1598), 2.

<sup>21</sup>On Crassus and his eel, see Allen Ward, "Crassus' Slippery Eel," *The Classical Review* 24 (1974): 185–86.

These more serious wet eel lampoons contain in them something of the insidious.

Thus, in Wilson's context, wet-eel rhetoric comes in many forms: the courtier's slimy eloquence; the bumbler's undulating nonsense; the inconstant lover's vague assurances; and the theologian's slippery doctrines. Moreover, these characters fit into the scenery of Wilson's inkhorn rhetoric passage, which is to say that the wet eel works almost perfectly as the animal behind Wilson's word-by-the-tail metaphor. The only substantial argument against the eel is a more substantial argument for the cuttlefish or some other creature (e.g., the snake). It is a mistake, therefore, to speak of significant weaknesses. Rather, the eel has two notable limitations. First, it produces neither ink nor venom, and so it lacks a layer of complexity, or analogical correspondence, that snakes and cuttlefish have, though the eel's slime counts for something. Secondly, more importantly, wet eels are slightly less capable than cuttlefish and serpents of symbolizing the sinister. This is the bigger issue. On the topic of metonyms for the malevolent, the eel is not quite as disturbing as some of the other creatures in the rogue's bestiary, nature's legion of doom, though the eel is certainly capable of disturbing the imagination.

If not the wet eel, then maybe the poisonous snake, but why? The idea of viperous eloquence pervades the English Renaissance, not to mention the whole of the Judeo-Christian rhetorical tradition. The Bible's dominant influence is the main reason, from the Serpent's trickery in the Garden of Eden to Christ's condemnation of venomous rhetoric in Matthew 12:34–35: "O generation of vipers, how can you speak well when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."<sup>22</sup> In Renaissance England, the chances are somewhat remote of reading a substantial religious polemic in which the writer does not use a metaphor connecting wicked eloquence to snakes.<sup>23</sup> The serpent's tail, however, is more unusual as an image, although not rare. The most common references (by far) are allusions to the scene in Exodus 4 where Moses grabs a snake by the tail and turns it into a stick, which is not what ordinarily happens when snakes are grabbed in that way. Other references to snakes' tails occur fairly regularly in the Renaissance and often involve religion. Take, for example,

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<sup>22</sup>See also Psalms 58:3–4: "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies. Their poison is like the poison of a serpent."

<sup>23</sup>Heinrich Bullinger provides a typical example: *An Holsome Antidotus or Counter-poysen, agaynst the Pestylent Heresye and Secte of the Anabaptistes Newly Translated out of Lat[i]n into Englysh by John Veron* (London: Humfrey Powell, 1548).

the early Protestant John Oldcastle's emblematic analogue connecting Catholic friars to serpents, as reported by John Bale:

One of the other doctors asked him: "Then what do ye say of the Pope?" The lord Cobham answered. "As I said before, he and you together maketh whole the great antichrist. Of whom he is the great head, you bishops, priests, prelates, and monks are the body, and the begging friars are the tail, for they cover the filthiness of you both, with their subtle sophistry."<sup>24</sup>

Of particular note is the reference to sophistry, scatological pun included, which is how most sixteenth-century Protestants described Catholic disputation. Catholics, of course, directed exactly the same charge at the Protestants. Additionally, Oldcastle's image exemplifies a seldom-discussed mnemonic device that Wilson touches on in Book 3, where key items in a series are to be held in the "memory" by superimposing them on parts of an animal's body: "in the Head, the Bellie, in the Taile, in the former parte of the legges, & also in the hinder part. So that by this meanes there shall be gathered an hundred and fiftene places."<sup>25</sup> Francis Yates is the scholar most remembered for spelling out Renaissance mnemonics, the method of loci, especially in terms of theater architecture and the places of memory, but there is also a neglected bestiary of mnemonics in the early modern period, as Oldcastle's analogy suggests.<sup>26</sup> Finally, while the image above may not seem to be one of grabbing a snake by the tail and then getting bitten by it, the implication is nonetheless present, because the snake's tail in this instance is the first stage in an almost inevitable cause-and-effect process. With the tail comes the fang. The former almost always suggests the latter. In Oldcastle's case, the image of the viper has everything to do with getting fatally poisoned by Antichrist's idiom, the head's venom, as a direct result of coming into contact with the friar's subtle sophistry, the snake's tail. He who holds a Catholic friar by the

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<sup>24</sup>Bale, "Examination and Death of Lord Cobham" (1544), in Henry Christmas, ed., *The Selected Works of John Bale* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1849), 38. Moments earlier, Oldcastle refers to Rome as a nest of vipers, of which the present metaphor is a continuation (36).

<sup>25</sup>Wilson, *Rhetorique*, 241.

<sup>26</sup>Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966). For another example of the bestiary of memory, see the Catholic Robert Browne's *An Answere to Master Cartwright* (London: 1585?), where he superimposes the hierarchy of the English Church upon the emblem of a "dragon": "when the Bishoppes which are greater usurpers are present, then they are heades, and both the dumbe ministers and hireling preachers, may serve well enough to be the tayle" (21).



hand, in other words, has a serpent by the tail and therefore should expect to be stricken.

Another illuminating reference to the snake's tail and rhetoric comes by way of Thomas More, who describes William Tyndale's eloquence in an unflattering way: "These wordes of Tyndale seme very gaye and gloryouse. But when ye shall well examyne them as gaye as the hed glytereth wyth the pretexte of Crystes owne holy wordes, yet shall ye fynde the tayle of hys tale as poysened as any serpent."<sup>27</sup> This is the fun More, the mischievous punster, as opposed to the lesser More who oftentimes seems humorless while churning out religious polemic. Like most scenarios involving the serpent's tail in Renaissance literature, the scenario here is at once a metaphor and a metalepsis. The tail implies the sting, and the warning is unmistakable: if we take Tyndale's words by their tails, then we will find ourselves bitten by a poisonous theology. Of course, such concerns over spiritual snakebites are a mainstay in the Christian rhetorical tradition, and the *Rhetorique* is no exception. In Book 3, for instance, Wilson warns against the "venomous backbyting" of libelers and cruel gossips, masters of guile who "poison" victims with their tongues.<sup>28</sup> Those who keep such undesirable company, those who grab the snake's tail, as Wilson suggests, find their reputations in danger. There is no honor among thieves, and gossips invariably hiss. The snake also makes a violent appearance in Book 2, where Wilson contrasts the gentle stork and her offspring with a particularly gruesome scene from nature's underbelly: "In young Vipers here is a contrary example, for as Pliny says, they eat out their dam's womb and so come forth."<sup>29</sup> The tail-and-bite inference is faint in this passage, but the serpent's fundamental nature is not, and, because they eat their own mothers (literally and figuratively), Wilson implies, they will undoubtedly bite us, when the opportunity presents itself.

Still, two problems persist, if we argue that Wilson was thinking of a snake. First, snakes do not produce ink, and so the analogy fails to satisfy in the exact way that the cuttlefish analogue does. But the snake's venom might be close enough, given the period's seemingly endless commentaries on venomous rhetoric, including Wilson's own. The poison-versus-ink issue is a minor one. Secondly, and more notably,

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<sup>27</sup>More, *The Second Parte of the Co[n]futacion of Tyndals Answere* (London: Wylliam Rastell, 1533), xxi.

<sup>28</sup>Wilson, *Rhetorique*, 186.

<sup>29</sup>Wilson, *Rhetorique*, 125. In *The Faerie Queene*, Canto 1, the Red Cross Knight slays the monster Error, only then to witness a horde of young vipers pour out of her womb and cannibalize her body.

snakes are rarely funny. This is the bigger problem. Hilarious episodes involving serpents getting grabbed by their tails are few and far between in the Renaissance. In fact, I cannot think of one, which is to say that the snake has a limited range of connotations, too limited to work properly as the creature in the *Rhetorique's* inkhorn passage. Wilson's arguments contain elements of the amusing, the absurd, and the slapstick, in addition to the ominous. The viper as a symbol simply lacks such connotative flexibility. The snake is unlikely.

A lot of devils get caught by their tails in Renaissance England, some more comically than others. Perhaps a devil's tail is what Wilson imagines in the inkhorn passage. The commonplace metaphor is worth pondering, especially because Wilson mentions the Devil more than thirty times in the *Rhetorique*. The "ghostly enemy" is one of the book's main figures and one of the main figures in every rhetorical guidebook from Augustine onward in the Christian rhetorical tradition.<sup>30</sup> We should assume that the idea of catching a devil by the tail is within the realm of possibility.

Edward Hall—the notable Protestant historiographer—provides a typical example. He describes an earnest but slightly-prone-to-flattery duchess who believes she courts a gentleman, only to discover an impostor: the "duches thinkyng to have gotten God by the foote [had] the devell by the tayle."<sup>31</sup> The Protestant devotional writer John Norden uses the image of the Devil's tail to a similar effect, including the inevitable demise that follows. In *A Mirror for the Multitude* (1586), he warns against the dangers of the mob's revelries: "if any will so rashly take partes with the multitude, leaving the heade of the truth, and come to that spring of errors, he taketh *Lucifer* by the tayle and with him leaveth the blessed estate of the faithfull to fall downe and become a reprobate."<sup>32</sup> Norden describes a scene of temptation, where charlatans lure curious onlookers into a life of endless Saturnalia, oblivion's march, where the more one drinks the more seemingly profound one's rhetoric becomes. John Lyly's Lucio in *Mother Bombie* has something like this in mind when he declares, "Every goblet is an inkhorn."<sup>33</sup> Norden's admonition is of the same variety. The Catholic priest Robert Browne invokes the

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<sup>30</sup>Wilson, *Rhetorique*, Preface. See Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D.W. Robertson (New York: Macmillan, 1958).

<sup>31</sup>Hall, *The Union of Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancashire* (London: Richard Grafton, 1548), fol. xxx.

<sup>32</sup>Norden, *Mirror for the Multitude* (London: John Windet, 1586), 29.

<sup>33</sup>Lyly, *Mother Bombie* (1594), ed. Leah Scragg (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 59.

Devil-by-the-tail metaphor in a similar way, but toward an entirely different target, the Church of England: "Bishoppes are greater usurpers at present. [They] are heades, and both the dumbe ministers and hireling preachers may serve well enough to be the tayle. For Satan hath always by such, as by the taile of the dragon, drawing the third part of the starres of heaven, and cast them to the earth."<sup>34</sup>

Browne's metaphor could easily be filed under reptiles and also under the bestiary of mnemonics, but most obviously it is about Satan's fall from grace, which included one-third of the heavenly choir who grabbed him by the tail and plunged into the Lowerarchy. By Browne's theological compass, the same kind of topsy-turvy process occurs through Henry VIII's rebellion, the break with Rome, which Catholics perceived as a Devil-by-the-tail state of affairs.

But is such devilry afoot in Wilson's admonition against inkhorn rhetoric? Maybe. Much of the inkhorn section addresses the issue of pride, either directly or indirectly, from the small town mayor's self-important rhetorical misfire to the mystical wise man's self-satisfying eloquence that proves opaque to everyone else. This, the problem of conceitedness, is where the Devil is most present in the inkhorn section. The Lincolnshire minister's preposterous letter further illustrates the point, because he likes hearing the sound of his own voice so much so that he loses all sense of his better rhetorical angels: "There is a Sacerdotall dignitie in my native Countrey contiguate to me, where I now contemplate: which your worshipfull benignitie could some impetrate for mee, if it would like you to extend your sedules and collaude me in them to the right honourable lord Chaunceller, or rather Archgrammacion of Englande."<sup>35</sup> On matters of pride and progressions into madness, the Devil is a good candidate for Wilson's catch-an-inkhorn-word-by-the-tail creature, because he is the archetype of vanity. Nonetheless, the complication with the Devil is substantial, if not insuperable. No orator would count himself to be "a fine Englishemen, and a good Rhetorician," if he held the Devil by the tail, nor would any sane audience in the Renaissance accept such a view.<sup>36</sup> The image proves incongruous. Hence, Wilson's inkhorn orator obviously believes that he has some natural creature in tow, just as Hall's love-struck duchess believes that she has prince charming in tow, not a toad. There is an ordinary creature in Wilson's inkhorn section, one that has been temporarily caught by the tail, or almost caught, with the caveat that the Devil may very well run alongside

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<sup>34</sup>Browne, *An Answer to Master Cartwright*, 21.

<sup>35</sup>Wilson, *Rhetorique*, 189.

<sup>36</sup>Wilson, *Rhetorique*, 162.

whatever beast Wilson has in mind. That is, devilry might inform the impish and disturbing connotations of the cuttlefish, the eel, etcetera, but the Devil remains only insinuated in the passage, not overtly presented.

Finally, the ox bears mentioning, but why? The answer involves Cacus, the fire-breathing giant and son of Vulcan who cleverly but not-so-cleverly stole some of Hercules' cattle.<sup>37</sup> He pulled the oxen backwards by their tails, making it appear as if they were walking out of his cave rather than toward it. In other words, he back-tracked in an effort to mislead Hercules, but one of the oxen mooed at an inopportune time, as oxen tend to do, and that was the death of Cacus.

Early modern writers invoke this story in order to provide a moral lesson about cattle rustling and, in many instances, word rustling—pulling words by their tails out of context and into the dens of rhetorical error. The Presbyterian minister Alexander Hume, for example, alludes to Cacus when he accuses his nemesis Adam Hill, an English bishop, of being a word rustler: "You pull my wordes, as Cacus did Hercules his Kein, into what stinking dennes it pleseth your wrangling braine to devise."<sup>38</sup> Thomas Stapleton, the Catholic priest and translator of the Venerable Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* (1565), makes similar use of the Cacus myth, but to a different theological end. He accuses the Protestant Robert Horne—the Cacus in this scenario—of rustling some of Johannes Nauclerus's phrases from the *World Chronicle* (1516), a book that influenced Stapleton's defense of Catholic historiography: "You see howe this Cacus hath drawn Nauclerus his wordes by the taylor into the lurking denne of his lying Conclusion."<sup>39</sup> In other words, Stapleton charges Horne with quoting Nauclerus out of context, which for Stapleton then becomes a fallacious syllogism leading into the cave of false history, the "lurking denne" of Protestant lies. The evangelical polemicist Heinrich Bullinger directs the same kind of argument against the Catholics, describing Pope Pius V as "a new Italian Cacus that puffeth out again his vaine flashes of fire, from those his shadie dennes [of] Aventine," where he "dazeth the sight of bleared folke with black foggesse and darcknes mixt

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<sup>37</sup> Among other places, the story appears in Livy's *History of Rome*, 1.7.7, Virgil's *Aeneid*, 8.194–279, and Ovid's *Fasti*, 1.575–8. It also appears in truncated form in Chaucer's *The Monk's Tale*, a new edition of which appeared in 1542.

<sup>38</sup> Hume, *A Rejoynder to Doctor [Adam] Hil Concerning the Descense of Christ into Hell* (Edinburgh: Robert Waldegrave, 1594), 6. The text to which Hume refers is Hill's *The Defense of the Article* (London: John Windet, 1592).

<sup>39</sup> Stapleton, *A Counterblast to [Robert] Horne* (Louanii: Apud Ioannem Foulherum, 1567), 201.

with fire."<sup>40</sup> From the Protestant standpoint, the metaphor works on several levels, including the truncated connection between St. Peter's Basilica and the giant's grim lair, the Aventine bluff that served as one of Rome's seven foundational hills. Bullinger's implication is that the Catholics have used subterfuge to obscure authentic Christianity.<sup>41</sup> They have done so, ostensibly (if the analogy is to hold), by herding words into false doctrines, papal bulls, and policies.

Wilson refers to Cacus in Book 3 of the *Rhetorique*, but he does so without the fanfare of a marvelous analogy. He simply alludes to "Cacus the theefe" and advises readers to keep the monster in mind, if searching for ways to illustrate pilfering, including—one assumes—rhetorical pilfering.<sup>42</sup> Might then Wilson be imagining an ox, when he describes those rhetoricians who seem pleased to have caught an inkhorn word by the tail? The ox is improbable, but there are a couple of logical explanations for it. First, like his mentor Cheke and, in some respects, the shrill nationalist Ralph Lever, Wilson dislikes the English willingness to take words haphazardly from other languages.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, he worries that herds of such terms endanger the coherence of the mother tongue and put England in peril. This patriotic concern is especially obvious in the *Rhetorique's* references to French powder and Italian chop.<sup>44</sup> Secondly, more importantly, Wilson wholeheartedly agrees with Bullinger's sentiments regarding the Pope-Cacus and Catholicism's counterfeit religion. He inherited this attitude from key evangelicals such as Hugh Latimer, Thomas Cranmer, and Roger Ascham, all of whom use the vernacular as a weapon in service of English Protestantism, for the "utter destruction of papistrie and heresy," as Ascham explains in *Toxophilus* (1545).<sup>45</sup> This same theological-rhetorical purpose operates at the core of the *Rhetorique*,

<sup>40</sup>Bullinger, *A Confutation of the Popes Bull* (London: John Day, 1572), 40.

<sup>41</sup>On the Protestant view that Adam and Eve were the first Protestants, see C.A. Patrides, "The Protevangelium in Renaissance Theology and *Paradise Lost*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* (1963): 19–30.

<sup>42</sup>Wilson, *Rhetorique*, 215.

<sup>43</sup>Cheke, like Wilson, stressed that inkhorn words should be borrowed only when necessary and with great "bashfulness" ("A Letter of Syr J. Chekes, To his loving frind Mayster Thomas Hoby," in *The Courtier of Count Baldessar Castilio*, trans. Thomas Hoby [London: Wylliam Seres, 1561]). Lever took anti-inkhorn sentiments to an illogical extreme in *The Arte of Reason* (London: A. Bynneman, 1573), where he pushed to abolish volumes of words not trueborn English.

<sup>44</sup>Wilson, *Rhetorique*, 162.

<sup>45</sup>Ascham, *Toxophilus* (1545) preface, in William Wright, ed., *English Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904), 50. On Wilson's Protestantism, see Ryan Stark, "Thomas Wilson's Apocalyptic Rhetoric," *Studies in Philology* 106 (2009): 341–53; Sloane, *On the Contrary*, cited in n.4, 220–40.

which places the book much closer to the Protestant sermon than to the Italian courtier's manual in terms of overall motive. Still, if Wilson had oxen in mind in the inkhorn section, then we should expect other clues to signal the primacy of the Cacus-and-ox analogy, and those clues are simply missing. We hear neither thunderbolts nor mooing. The ox is doubtful.

### WHY THE CUTTLEFISH?

What recommends the cuttlefish, or ink-fish, as Wilson's creature (see Figure 1)?<sup>46</sup> Notably, the period's critics use the beast as a symbol for various rhetorical problems: theological opacity, courtly scheming, overstuffed pedantry, and overt rhetorical villainy, to identify the most common. Wilson addresses all of these issues in the inkhorn section, making the cuttle a viable candidate for his catch-a-word-by-the-tail metaphor. A closer look at Renaissance cuttlefish references will make the creature even more viable, I believe, if not definitive.

First, the cuttlefish frequently appears in Renaissance debates about religion. For instance, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer deems a cuttlefish—eight times—the Catholic priest and defender of transubstantiation Stephen Gardiner. The following remark is typical: “the cuttle here with his black colors and dark speeches goeth about [to] cover and hide the matter” of “the sacramental bread and wine.”<sup>47</sup> Like other evangelicals, Cranmer sees in transubstantiation a form of scholastic trickery, that is, cuttlefish rhetoric, a theme pervading his more than four-hundred pages of what Diarmaid MacCulloch calls “savage” polemic.<sup>48</sup> Nicholas Ridley also describes Catholic theologians as “cuttles [who] cast their colours” in order to circumvent the plain truths discovered by Protestant hermeneutics, an argument that resonated with nearly every reformer in England.<sup>49</sup> John Calvin finds the beast lurking in Andreas Osiander's mysticism, especially the doctrine of “essential righteousness,” which “is lyke a cuttle that with

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<sup>46</sup>The striking broadside depicts an adult cuttlefish, “his taile reede and fower cornered like to a priestes Cap,” that is, a liturgical biretta (English Broadside Ballad Archive, ID 32405; Huntington Library, Britwell 18317).

<sup>47</sup>Cranmer, *An Answer unto a Crafty and Sophistical Cavillation* (London: John Day, 1551), 112.

<sup>48</sup>For more on Cranmer's cuttlefish metaphor, see Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer, A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 488.

<sup>49</sup>Ridley, *A Brief Declaration of the Lord's Supper* (1555), in Henry Christmas, ed., *The Works of Nicholas Ridley* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1843), 36.



immediately follows his complaint about the intentional “darkenesse” of grandiose priests and occult philosophers. Against the backdrop of Wilson’s polemical scenery, the cuttlefish fits quite naturally.

When the cuttle is not being used to impugn the period’s numinous theology, it sometimes appears as a negative emblem for courtly machination. The satirist Joseph Hall vividly illustrates the concept:

the craftie *Cuttle* lieth sure  
in the black *Cloud* of his thick vomiture.<sup>53</sup>

Thomas Nashe provides a similar example via the “bursten belly inkhorn orator called Vanderhulk,” a figure in *The Unfortunate Traveler* (1594) who functions as a caricature of Nashe’s nemesis Gabriel Harvey.<sup>54</sup> Vanderhulk’s gorged stomach is literal, suggesting avarice, but also symbolic of the disordered memory, which produces not the well-digested idea but rather rhetorical vomit, calling to mind the cuttlefish’s ink-squirting ways.<sup>55</sup> The history of rhetoric, of course, is full of such rhetoric-as-vomit metaphors, many of which evoke the cuttle, from Lucian’s long-winded Lexiphanes to Rabelais’s mealy-mouthed scholar in *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1534), both masters of regurgitation.<sup>56</sup> And so too, presumably, is Wilson’s “Lawyer” who “store[s] his stomacke with the prating of Pedlers,” ready to emit officialese, no doubt, if threatened or cornered. The same might be said of Wilson’s unlikely politician in Book 2. He vomits up rubbish—literally and rhetorically—while sitting in parliament, a scene meant to recall Cicero’s less than admiring account of Marc Anthony in the Roman Senate.<sup>57</sup> Wilson, in other words, participates in a long tradition of associating bad rhetoric with vomit, and the creature most often implicated in this tradition, if a creaturely analogue is called for, is the cuttlefish.

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<sup>53</sup>Joseph Hall, *Satires Virgidemiarum* (London: Robert Dexter, 1597), Book 4, Satire I.

<sup>54</sup>Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveler and Other Works*, ed. J.B. Steane (New York: Penguin, 1972), 292.

<sup>55</sup>Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R.F. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin, 1961), 207–52.

<sup>56</sup>Lucian, “Lexiphanes,” in *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, trans. H.W. Fowler and F.G. Fowler, Vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), 264–69; Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532–1564), trans. Burton Raffel (New York: Norton, 1990), 2.6.147. Consider also Marston-Crispinus in Ben Jonson’s *Poetaster* (1601), the hack writer who regurgitates Latin words after taking an emetic.

<sup>57</sup>Wilson, *Rhetorique*, 122–23; Cicero, “A Second Oration against Mark Antony,” in *Cicero’s Select Orations*, trans. William Duncan (London: Paternoster-Row, 1792), 619. On this rhetoric-and-vomit episode in Wilson, see Seth Lerer, “An Art of the Emetic: Thomas Wilson and the Rhetoric of Parliament,” *Studies in Philology* 98 (2001): 158–83.



The idea of the pedant as cuttlefish also appears regularly throughout early modern writing, due in part to the longstanding association between Aristotelians and cuttles.<sup>58</sup> The lampoon goes back at least to the second-century Platonist Atticus, who compared Aristotle and his followers to the beast because of their cloudy expressions: the Aristotelians “cloak” their philosophy in “obscure language, like cuttlefish making themselves hard to catch by their darkness.”<sup>59</sup> The epithet stuck and, in fact, gained considerable momentum in the Renaissance, where no group took more pleasure in it than the humanists. They invoked the cuttle moniker to lambast Aristotle’s allies, most notably the scholastics. The purpose was to deride grandiose terminologies and distinctions without differences. The portrait of the cuttlefish scholar that emerges is decidedly unflattering, suggesting a counterfeit ethos, a puffed up version of the self behind which lurks an amalgam of pride and emotional frigidity. This is the pedantic cephalopod that Mrs. Cadwallader from *Middlemarch* spots in the form of Mr. Casaubon, upon whose coat of arms she speculates: “I suppose the family quarterings are three cuttlefish sable and a commentator rampant.”<sup>60</sup> George Eliot’s image is a masterstroke for several reasons, not the least of which is its power to convey Casaubon’s disguised remoteness, his emotional frigidity cloaked in the rhetoric of grand conversation.<sup>61</sup> Earlier, Mistress Indulgence, in William Hawkins *Apollo Shroving* (1627), comes to a similar conclusion when she complains about a remote academic who pays too little attention to relationships: “an inkhorn squirt, a botching patcher of Latin.”<sup>62</sup>

Wilson’s Lincolnshire minister fits squarely within this tradition of spoofing pedantry, which has both comic and tragic elements. The comic elements are more pronounced in the *Rhetorique*’s case, causing Wilson

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<sup>58</sup>Charles Schmidt, “Aristotle as Cuttlefish: The Origin and Development of a Renaissance Image,” *Studies in the Renaissance* 12 (1965): 60–72.

<sup>59</sup>Cited in Schmidt, 61. Atticus’s writings survived through Eusebius’s *Præparatio Evangelica*, which was reprinted and widely circulated in a 1554 translation (Schmidt, 61–2).

<sup>60</sup>Eliot, *Middlemarch* (1871–72), ed. Rosemary Ashton (New York: Penguin, 2003), 56.

<sup>61</sup>Longinus has a word for this type of eloquence: *psychrotes* (ψυχρότης), which James Arieti and John Crossett translate as “false wit,” but they clarify the term in their notes to *On the Sublime* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985): “Literally, the word means ‘coldness,’ and is applied to snow, air, and dead things; by extension it is applied to a cold-hearted person, and then to one who is flat, lifeless, insipid” (25).

<sup>62</sup>Hawkins, *Apollo Shroving* (London: Printed for Robert Mylbourne, 1627), 64.

to compare the ridiculous parson to “William Sommers,” England’s most famous jester, with the stipulation that the Lincolnshire man does not yet know that he plays the fool.<sup>63</sup> Instead, we discover an oblivious writer tangled up in his own stratagems, unwilling it seems to engage in genuine dialogue, but all too willing to use big words: *sesquipedalia verba*, as Horace puts it in *Ars Poetica*, terms of a foot and a half in length.<sup>64</sup> The effect is funny, though not in an uncomplicated way. Something disturbing also lingers. After all, we encounter a preacher who has lost control of his own sincerity.<sup>65</sup> This is a bad development by any rhetorical standard, but it is especially dangerous in the theological sense. Imagine an entire sermon written in such a discourse. The most substantial problem caused by the parson’s bedazzling rhetoric is that of impenetrability in matters most urgent from the Christian standpoint: salvation, the sacraments, prayer. Latimer, Wilson’s spiritual and rhetorical forerunner, regularly complains about Catholic priests who use Latin to keep the English flock in ignorance of Scripture. Wilson makes almost exactly the same complaint in the inkhorn section, only pretentious English is the culprit, not Latin per se. But the letter might as well be in Latin. As Wilson asks, “what unlearned man can tel, what half this letter signifieth?”<sup>66</sup> The absurd letter therefore functions simultaneously as comic relief and as a sober morality tale, an indication of what happens when English preachers aspire to be unnecessarily grand. That is, their vocabularies become inundated with murky words whose tails are very difficult to grab.

Finally, the cuttlefish sometimes functions as an emblem of blatant rhetorical wickedness. The ink in these cases functions as a metonym

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<sup>63</sup>Wilson, *Rhetorique*, 163. Michael Hattaway glosses the expression “inkhorn mate” as “pedantic churl!” in *The First Part of King Henry VI* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 123n.

<sup>64</sup>Horace, *Satires. Epistles. The Art of Poetry*, ed. and trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 458.

<sup>65</sup>George Orwell identified insincerity as the key sentiment behind bafflegab: “The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one’s real and one’s declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish squirting out ink” (*A Collection of Essays* [New York: Harcourt, 1970], 167).

<sup>66</sup>Wilson, *Rhetorique*, 164. The Lincolnshire minister’s absurd idiom may have been partly inspired by Andrew Boorde, a flatterer and “proctour for the papists,” as John Ponet described him (*An Apologie Fully Answeringe by Scriptures and Anceant Doctors, a Blasphemose Book Gathered by D. Steph. Gardiner* [Strasbourg: Printed by the heirs of W. Kœpfel, 1556], 48). Boorde’s preface to *A Dyetary of Healthe* (London: Wylliam Powell, 1547) sounds grandiose in a way similar to that of the Lincolnshire minister’s letter: “To the armypotent Prynce and valyent lorde Thomas Duke of Northfolke Andrewe Boorde of physycke doctor: doth surrender humyle commendacyon with immortal thannces.”

for foul language of one sort or another (e.g., cursing, gossiping, mud-slinging, scuttle-butting). Perhaps Shakespeare yields the most well-known example in English literature, the scene in *Henry IV, Part Two*, where the prostitute Doll Tearsheet scolds the less-than-honorable Pistol: "Away, you cut-purse rascal! You filthy bung, away! By this wine, I'll thrust my knife in your moldy chaps, and you play the saucy cuttle with me. Away, you bottle-ale rascal! You basket-hilt stale juggler, you!"<sup>67</sup> The "saucy cuttle" is usually glossed as "bully," or some variation therein, but the direct cuttlefish insult is equally obvious and functions as one more example of Shakespeare's preference for double entendres, or—in this case—triple entendres. A "cuttle" is also a type of knife. In any event, we find ourselves watching an ironic episode. One cuttle calls another saucy, and ink darkens everyone in the Boar's Head Tavern. In a sermon delivered at St. Paul's Cross, Richard Bancroft provides another typical illustration of the malicious cuttlefish while describing a veritable rogue's gallery of negative rhetorical archetypes, most of which he associates with the Presbyterians:

To the mermaids because they hide their errors under their counterfeit and faire speeches: [to] the fish named a Cuttle, for that they infect men with their blacke and slanderous calumniation: to snakes or adders, the poison of aspes being under their lips: to the viper, because they regarde not the wound & destroy their mother the church: [and] to diverse other thinges as ought to make them odious to all that love truth.<sup>68</sup>

A grim taxonomy. Beware of these kinds of creatures, Bancroft warns, and—perhaps more to the point—do not become one of these kinds of creatures. Edmund Spenser gives similar advice in *The Faerie Queene* (1590), using the monster Error as a symbol of linguistic impiety. When cornered by the Red Cross Knight, the Gorgon-like fiend regurgitates half-digested books and bile of the blackest sort, a particularly distasteful form of circumlocution.<sup>69</sup> And while Spenser fails to offer a full genealogy of the beast, we can reasonably assume that a cuttlefish is part of the lineage.

But does such wicked rhetoric loom in Wilson's passage on the inkhorn? Is there a malevolent cuttle to be found? The answer is yes, I think, but only in the deep subtext. The beastly cuttlefish stirs at the bottom of the *Rhetorique's* inkhorn section, much like Tennyson's Kraken—the most famous cuttlefish in Victorian literature—stirs at

<sup>67</sup>Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part Two*, cited in n.18, 2.4.130–34.

<sup>68</sup>Bancroft, *Sermon at St. Paul's Cross* (London: Printed by E. B., 1589), 6.

<sup>69</sup>Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Thomas Roche (New York: Penguin, 1979), 46.

the bottom of “the abysmal sea.”<sup>70</sup> Wilson’s remark about the proper borrowing of Latin words is a good place to look. After noting that rhetoricians might import foreign words and phrases to supplement the language, Wilson gives three less than random examples: “letters patent,” “prerogative,” as in the “King’s prerogative,” and “communion,” all Latin-based terms deemed perfectly appropriate, assuming that they are used in the normal way and with a proper understanding, by which Wilson means on the philosophical level an English Protestant understanding.<sup>71</sup> Of these, communion is the most intriguing. It immediately invokes the period’s vehement debates over the body and blood of Christ. Wilson’s definition, “a fellowship, or a coming together,” should be read as Protestant provocation and is essentially a truncated version of what comes later in Book 3, in the section on synecdoche: “By eating bread at the Communion, we remember Christes death, and by faith we receive him spiritually.”<sup>72</sup> Evangelicals like Wilson perceived in Holy Communion a form of spiritual fellowship, and they detected in Catholic transubstantiation a kind of blood magic that inverted the correct understanding of the sacrament, obscuring the truth of Golgotha and the empty tomb by repeating the literal sacrifice daily, as if the first one did not take hold. That is, Catholic Communion struck the reformers as a wicked inversion of The Lord’s Supper and, structurally speaking, similar to other modes of blood ritual in the Renaissance (e.g., “By the pricking of my thumbs / something wicked this way comes”).<sup>73</sup> And it is here—in Wilson’s suggestive play with the term “communion”—where we catch a glimpse of the malevolent cuttle, though we must squint. The malevolence is by no means obvious, but the fact remains that English Protestants in the 1550s invoked the cuttlefish to demonize Catholic sacramentalism, especially communion. The cuttle’s indiscriminate use of ink and, by analogy, blood captured precisely the reformers’ two interrelated complaints: arcane rhetoric and the concomitant arcane ontology of Christ’s blood, as stipulated by the Catholic doctrine, which turns the wafer itself into a kind of cuttlefish in miniature. Wilson’s mentioning of communion stirs up this religious controversy. Does he draw for us a definitive picture of the diabolical cuttle? Not exactly, but he gives us enough information for an

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<sup>70</sup>Tennyson, *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (London: Effingham Wilson, Royal Exchange, 1830), 154.

<sup>71</sup>Wilson, *Rhetorique*, 165.

<sup>72</sup>Wilson, *Rhetorique*, 175.

<sup>73</sup>Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (1623), ed. Nicholas Brooke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.1.59–60.

inductive leap, an enthymeme. And the more general point is obvious: Wilson blesses a certain kind of inkhorn borrowing, as long as the English do not borrow Rome's theological framework. Theology of rhetoric is the issue, not syntax, not particular word choices. "Communion," yes; "communion" that implies transubstantiation, no.

A humanist among humanists, Wilson would have encountered cuttlefish lampoons on a regular basis and in several books, two of which stand out as the most likely direct sources behind his word-by-the-(cuttlefish)-tail metaphor. The first is Alard of Amsterdam's 1539 edition of Rudolph Agricola's vehemently anti-scholastic *De Inventione Dialectica* (1479), a version upon which Wilson drew heavily while composing *The Rule of Reason* (1551) and the *Rhetorique*.<sup>74</sup> Alard, in a footnote, explicitly connects Aristotle and the scholastics to cuttlefish.<sup>75</sup> The second likely source is Cranmer's widely circulated *Answer unto a Crafty and Sophistical Cavillation* (1551), as already mentioned above, where the archbishop repeatedly associates scholastic rhetoric with the cuttle's ink-squirting ways. Of additional interest, too, is Cranmer's antidote for cuttlefish discourse: the Protestant plain style, a standard by which he measures—and finds wanting—Rome's foggy rhetoric and other types of linguistic guile, as discerned by the English Protestants.<sup>76</sup> It is more than a coincidence that Wilson's cure for inkhorn rhetoric is also Protestant plainness, by which he means what Cranmer means: non-Catholic rhetoric. We can reasonably speculate that Cranmer's 1551 *Answer* is an undiscovered source for the *Rhetorique's* inkhorn section, and, more to the point, gave Wilson visions of scholastic cuttlefish.

As an emblem of inkpot rhetoric, the cuttlefish satisfies on several levels and to varied effects. Symbolic flexibility, from the absurd to the sinister, makes the cuttle highly attractive as the subject of Wilson's catch-a-word-by-the-tail metaphor, especially given the *Rhetorique's* far-ranging set of inkhorn illustrations. Add to symbolic flexibility the fact that the cuttlefish—more than any other creature in the Renaissance bestiary—connotes what the humanists perceived as scholastic bafflegab, and we arrive at a compelling

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<sup>74</sup>See Sloane, *On the Contrary*, cited in n.4, 215; Walter Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 119–20.

<sup>75</sup>Schmidt, cited in n.58, 70.

<sup>76</sup>In the *Answer Unto A Crafty and Sophistical Cavillation*, Cranmer uses the term "plain" more than seventy times in contradistinction to what he perceives as Catholic subterfuge. On stylistic plainness as a theological concept, see Kenneth Graham, *Plainness and Rhetoric in the Early English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Debora Shuger, *The Christian Grand Style in the English Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

case. Only one seeming problem works against the cuttlefish argument: not a lot of cephalopods get caught by their tails in Renaissance literature, unlike eels or devils, for instance. But there is a rational explanation for the relative scarcity of the cuttlefish's tail, in light of the relative abundance of the period's cuttlefish references. Almost every use of the cuttle metaphor is simultaneously a metalepsis. The cuttlefish's ink, or the orator's inkhorn rhetoric by analogy, is the observable effect of a cause always implied, that is, an attempt to catch a cuttle by the tail. In other words, the cuttlefish's tail is ever-present as the unstated first premise leading to the observable consequence, not the proverbial handful of dust, but rather the not-so-proverbial mouthful of ink.

## CONCLUSION

Wilson ridicules drunken country mayors and grave-diggers who always seem to find the wrong words, but such characters should not be taken as significant targets of scorn. They are comic relief. Not so with England's elite, however, because they have real power to shape the vernacular, or at least the official version of it. The serious villains in the inkhorn section are those overstuffed clerks and refined courtiers who seem incapable of authentic communication yet all too capable of putting on airs. They catch inkhorn words by their tails and are counted to be fine rhetoricians. But to what bad end might such a concept of eloquence lead? How much harm can a few haughty neologisms cause? Plenty, Wilson suggests, and for reasons that go beyond what most modern readers expect from a rhetorical guidebook. Abuse of the inkpot threatens the well-being of the soul and of Protestant England, which explains why the inkhorn section sounds less like a passage from a typical writing manual and more like Menippean satire. As such, Wilson's reproach of the inkhorn fits squarely within the *Rhetorique's* many other moral admonitions. Avoid prostitutes.<sup>77</sup> Stop drinking excessively.<sup>78</sup> Be suspicious of Catholics, with the exceptions of Thomas More and Erasmus, apparently, and do not abuse the inkhorn.<sup>79</sup> Had the Douay-Rheims Bible existed at the time, then Wilson undoubtedly would have criticized it, too. The organizing principle behind all of these warnings is the

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<sup>77</sup>Wilson, *Rhetorique*, 93, 107, 121.

<sup>78</sup>Wilson, *Rhetorique*, 122.

<sup>79</sup>Wilson, *Rhetorique*, 39, 63, 147, 199.

same: try not to sin, rhetorically or otherwise. Abstain from linguistic vices, of which inkhorn rhetoric is a chief example.

Wilson warns England against inkpot indulgences. He does this mostly for religious reasons, and, as we should expect from a clever humanist, he finds the perfect classical emblem to make his point: the calumnious cuttlefish. Eels will not work, because they lack a certain kind of sobriety, and yet serpents are too grave. Devils and oxen exist within the realm of possibility, but neither is a satisfying alternative to the cuttlefish. The cuttle fits best. It invites all of the right comic and tragic connotations, and—more importantly—it most cogently conveys Wilson's spiritual anxieties, especially his anti-scholasticism and anti-Catholic sacramentalism. The cuttlefish metaphor allows us to discern Wilson's deepest rationale, his theological rationale, for condemning inkhorn rhetoric.