Published in 1593, Thomas Lodge’s *Phillis: Honoured with Pastoral Sonnets, Elegies and Amorous Delights* comprises forty sonnets, two eclogues, an elegy and an ode which, though not precisely set in the conventional pastoral setting that the title promises, portrays shepherd Damon’s unrequited wooing of Phillis, followed by a long poem entitled *The Complaint of Elstred*. The layout of the poems – inclusive of the complaint – closely follows other coeval sonnet cycles, thus fuelling the fad for Petrarchan lyric sequences after Philip Sidney, Giles Fletcher the Elder, Samuel Daniel or Barnabe Barnes. However, of all the works of Lodge, *Phillis* is possibly the one that was greeted with the least enthusiasm by his contemporaries, as well as by modern critics. As it happens, at variance with the sonnets of Philip Sidney, Samuel Daniel, Michael Drayton or Henry Constable, *Phillis* was published in only one edition and was never after reissued or reprinted. Perhaps the main reason for this inattention has to do with the fact that *Phillis* is not entirely the product of Lodge’s own inventiveness. The silent debts to French and Italian poets such as Petrarch, Desportes, Ronsard, Ariosto and Paschale are recognisable in about half of the sonnets, many of which are, in reality, imitations and fairly close translations or paraphrases of the European originals, as several scholars have striven to show. Suspicions of plagiarism thus affected the response to *Phillis* not only among Lodge’s contemporaries but also among modern scholars. By attesting to ‘Lodge’s servile dependence on Ronsard’ and other European poets, Sidney Lee affirmed that ‘it is a misuse to describe him [Lodge] as an original poet seeking to give voice to his individuality’, whereas...
Charles W. Whitworth has suggested that Lodge’s sequence is just the result of having randomly gathered a series of unconnected poems, composed during a long period, with the sole intention of adhering to the popular trend of the sonnet cycle. In general, led by this inclination to accept Phyllis simply as a clear case of literary imitation, modern scholars have largely focused their efforts on ascertaining the sources of the poems.

As it stands, it is a fact that in Phyllis Lodge silently echoed French and Italian poets. However, his original poems are, on the contrary, evident exemplars of his own invention – embodied in that ‘Genius of my Muse’ he invokes in the ‘Induction’. As I argue in the following pages, the original sonnets constitute a productive space for the exploration of the poetics of this kind of sonnet compilation. These poems establish the basis on which Lodge tacitly interrogates the meaning of creativity in a work where, ironically enough, translation and imitation are primary raisons d’être. For all this, I contend that a reassessment of these poems could at the very least help enrich the critical response to Phyllis and re-evaluate it as something more than a random collection of imitative verses lacking a real ‘method’ or intended dispositio. As stated above, Whitworth has been very assertive in this regard, and no less than him were the two modern editors of the text, Sidney Lee and Martha Foote Crow, who coincided in excluding The Complaint of Elstred after considering it a later addition totally unrelated to the sonnets. However, while there might be reasons to suppose that Lodge did not arrange his poems as conscientiously as the authors of other sonnet collections, the sequence’s structure and its concern with the nature of poetic creativity appear to evince an internal plan that counters the received idea of Phyllis as an unoriginal and incongruent assemblage of poems.

At first glance, a comparable incongruity seems to characterise other works by Lodge, yet research has proven their internal coherence. For example, published only two years after Phyllis, A Fig for Momus, similarly ‘containing Pleasant varietie, included in Satyres, Eclogues, and Epistles’, shows unity in the diversity of its poems. As Arthur F. Kinney explains, Lodge’s concern with a humanist poetics of felicity serves to ‘bind together all the disparate works of this Momus’, as well as to progressively transform the classical god of mockery into a more transcendent character. Another of Lodge’s works that at first reading appears to have an unsystematic structure, comparable to that presumed in Phyllis, is An Alarum against Usurers, published in 1584. Conceived as a warning against the misuse of moneylending, An Alarum ‘seems to be an odd collection of
juvenile *imitatio* of deliberative declamation, Alexandrian romance, and allegorical satire. But an attentive analysis of the three sections discloses the logic of the sequence. In Kinney’s words,

the exhortation and pastoral serve as humanist precept and illustration, while the concluding poem serves to reconcile the dialectic by partaking simultaneously of both. Lodge thus gives us a new kind of triadic art in which each of the three parts, separately and together, responds to the Latin motto on the title page of this and other works by Lodge.8

This combination of narratives provides the key to understanding the meaning of *An Alarum*, a formula that Lodge would repeat in *Rosalynde* (1590), ‘where pastoral romance in Arden realizes the precepts of Sir John of Bordeaux’.9 That the closing poem in *An Alarum* is a complaint—entitled *Truth’s Complaint over England*—that helps bring together the debate as explored in the previous two sections might also give a clue about the significance of the final complaint in *Phillis*. Although Lee and Crow omitted it in their respective editions, when *Phillis* is compared to other sequences, one can infer that *The Complaint of Elstred* is most probably not an addition to the sonnets, but a coherent part of the whole sequence, just as, for example, *The Complaint of Rosamond* is a part of Samuel Daniel’s *Delia* (1592) or *Truth’s Complaint over England* is a decisive element of *An Alarum*.

In any case, even if the pattern of *Phillis* is the most arbitrary—in which the varied interspersed poems perhaps only serve to ‘anticipate and complicate their relationship to the poems that succeed them’10—in the poems of Lodge’s own invention there is an evident interest in recurrent issues of literary creativity that were similarly discussed by other coeval authors, and that accordingly turn *Phillis* into a site as valuable for the exploration of Elizabethan poetics as the sonnet cycles of Sidney, Fletcher or Daniel. In fact, by maintaining that in the line of succession of *Astrophil and Stella*, *Phillis* plays an important role comparable to that of *Delia, Licia* (1593) or even Drayton’s *Ideas Mirror* (1594), Joel B. Davis has pointed to its tripartite structure and use of trochaic verse in the ode and second eclogue as decisive choices in the evolution of the English sonnet sequence:

If Lodge’s trochaic poems extend the trend of simplifying the flexible experiments with trochaic meter emphasized in the 1591 quartos of *Astrophel and Stella*—with a purpose and not out of incompetence—then his *Complaint of Elstred* extends and sophisticates the meditation of succession and decay begun in *Delia* and *Rosamond*.11
All this makes the more sense when one recalls that, along with Sidney’s *Defence of Poesy* (c. 1580) and Daniel’s later *Defence of Rhyme* (1603), Lodge also led the way in theorising about literature – and drama in particular – when, as early as 1579, he anonymously published *A Reply to Stephen Gosson’s Schoole of Abuse in Defence of Poetry, Musick, and Stage Plays*. That is why I presume that a new reading of *Phillis*, with an emphasis on its immaterial as well as material features, will help the understanding of its poetic nature or what, in accordance with the premises of this volume, we could perhaps describe as a kind of *unwritten* poetics. Just as Jonathan Sell argues in this volume that Sidney’s ‘unwritten art’ emerging from *Astrophil and Stella* completes the theoretical model that he renders in *The Defence of Poesy*, we could similarly argue that *Phillis* exhibits a comparable attitude in also functioning as a kind of test case for a practical poetics of imitation. After all, in his sonnet sequence Lodge silently tackles questions of poetic invention likewise recurrent in the works of other Elizabethan poets such as Sidney – an undertaking that might help us to reassess his part in the evolution of Elizabethan poetry and his position as a forerunner in the publication of sonnet sequences. Such a claim seems necessary in order to appraise the general reaction to *Phillis*, which since its publication has repeatedly been listed solely for its imitative nature, and virtually ignored for its other literary attributes.

To such an extent has *Phillis* been considered a mere replica of French and Italian poetry that Michael Drayton’s dedicatory sonnet in his *Ideas Mirrour* (1594) has been presumed to sneer at Lodge’s imitative habits:

> Yet these mine owne, I wrong not other men,  
> Nor traffique further than thys happy Clyme  
> Nor filch from Portes nor from Petrarck’s pen,  
> A fault too common in thys latter time.  
> Divine Syr Phillip, I avouch thy writ,  
> I am no Pickpurse of anothers wit.13

Contradicting Kastner, Burton Paradise and Whitworth maintain instead that Drayton’s lines are vague, and could as well refer to any other poet as to Lodge, as the sonnet sequences of Thomas Watson, Samuel Daniel and Henry Constable, among others, similarly bristled with comparable echoes of French and Italian poetry. Whether or not Drayton’s charges of plundering were indeed addressed to Lodge, it is a fact that, despite the success of *Rosalynde* (1590), at some point in his career Lodge had to confront serious accusations
of plagiarism and inefficiency that overshadowed his literary reputation. In the epistle to the reader of the aforementioned *A Fig for Momus*, Lodge justified the title of this work by stating that

> vnder this title I haue thought good to include Satyres, Eclogues, and Epistles: first by reason that I studie to delight with varietie, next because I would write in that forme, wherin no man might chalenge me with seruile imitation, (wherewith heretofore I haue beene vniustlie taxed).

The real cause for such a vindication remains unknown, but evinces that, not long before the publication of *A Fig for Momus*, some of Lodge's works had been – ‘vniustlie’, he retorts – singled out as examples of literary theft. This is a question to which Lodge again returns in *Wits Misery* (1596), where he denounces the fact that, merely out of spite or envy, some authors are systematically and wrongly blamed either for extensive borrowing or lack of creativity. He protests that if for whatever reason a work fails to gain other scholars’ favour, these will indict its author of piracy, or else insufficient originality: ‘Let a scholler write, Tush (saith he) I like not these common fellowes: let him write well, he hath stolen it out of some note booke: let him translate, Tut, it is not of his owne.’

Copious referencing of other writers was a sign of the times. Otherwise, in *A Reply to Gosson’s Schoole of Abuse* (1579), Lodge would not have invited Gosson to disclose the sources of his arguments:

> Tell me Gosson was all your owne you wrote there: did you borow nothing of your neybours? Out of what booke patched you out Ciceros oration? Whence fet you Catulins inuective? Thys is one thing, aliena . . . olet lucerni non tuam, so that your helper may wisely reply vpon you with Virgil.

Additionally, in the epistle to the reader of *A Fig for Momus*, in what seems to be, as Harold Ogden White suggests, a critical remark on E. K.’s glosses to *The Shepherd’s Calendar*, Lodge maintains that ‘for my Eclogues, I commend them to men of approved iudgment, whose margents though I fill not with quotations, yet their matter, and handling, will show my diligence’. Our poet thus claims that in his eclogues he had followed the classical models just as other writers such as Spenser had done, which shows that his practices did not significantly differ from those of other authors of the period. He further explains that there was no need to mention the sources of his poetry; educated readers, imbued as they were with the Renaissance praxis of imitation,
would be able to recognise these or, at best, appreciate the imitative quality of his poems. Moreover, in the epistle to the reader of *The Divel Coniured* (1596), he laments that his works, when praised for their rhetoric, were contrariwise criticised for the way matters were handled – that is, with the *dispositio* of his arguments, if in the following statement we understand ‘iudgement’ as comparable to the second division of rhetoric: ‘If the handling [makes you suspect], I repent me not, for I had rather you should now condemn me for default in Rhetoricke, then as in times past, commend my stile, and lament my iudgement.’

Comments such as these corroborate Paradise’s assertion about the difficulty of ascertaining Lodge’s actual relations with his literary contemporaries, while they nourish the belief that ‘Lodge seems to have been always on the doorstep of Parnassus, but never to have quite succeeded in entering the company of the elect’.

Taken as a whole, the rejection of these accusations of plagiarism impelled Lodge to contend that his poetry simply put into effect the conventional practice of *imitatio*, to which he was inevitably pushed by the trends, as he indicated in *William Longbeard* (1593):

> Taylors and Writers nowadays are in like estimate, if they want new fashions they are not fancied: & if the stile be not of the new stamp, tut the Author is a foole. In olde time menne studied to illustrate matter with words, now we strive for words beside matter. Since therefore the time is such, and judgementes are so singular, since the maners are altrd with men, and men are in thraldome to their fashionate maners, I will with the Diar prepare my selfe to washe out the spots as soone as they are spied, and borrow some cunning of the drawer, to colour an imperfection so well as I can, till such time I have cunning to cut my garment out of the whole cloath.

Without arguing any further, this excerpt stands comparison with the ideas about art and imitation endorsed in Puttenham’s *The Art of English Poesy* (1589) and quoted in the introduction to this volume. In this regard, it is remarkable that, like Puttenham, Lodge also dissociates poetic imitation from mere imitative practices regulated by ‘example or mediation or exercise’. That the ‘Diar’ and the ‘drawer’ are then preferred over the painter, who counterfeits ‘the natural by the like effects’, is quite revealing. In line with Puttenham, Sidney or even George Chapman, Lodge also suggests here a kind of poetic imitation which, though ‘measured by the efficacy of poetic style’, should deliver a ‘high, and harty invention exprest in most significant, and unaffected phrase’. In accordance with these general attitudes in Elizabethan poetics, Lodge similarly
rejects an idea of imitation solely based on the observation of patterns and models established by modes.

These explanations should be evidence enough to prove, as he complains in *A Fig for Momus*, that he is not ‘a servile imitator’. What is more, by additionally affirming that ‘I have so written, as I have read’, Lodge implies that his – ‘vniustlie taxed’ – method of composition simply ties in with the practice of *imitatio* endorsed by Renaissance scholars, and, above all, with the kind of emulation that results from individual reinterpretation of celebrated models. This is where the real value of *imitatio* rests, as he makes Ergasto affirm in ‘Eclogue I’ of *A Fig for Momus*:

Let yong men boast what art they list,
Mine eares chiefe pleasure doth consist,
In hearing what concentfull laies
Our Fathers chaunted in their daies;
For often have I found this true,
The sence is olde, the words be newe:
What ere the yonger boast and brave,
Their worth, and wit, from eld they have.

Although no one can deny that in *Phillis*, Lodge imitated other European poets, the poems of his own invention corroborate that these imitations functioned indeed as the basis and inspiration for his own poetry, for which his Muse proved to be ‘enfranchis’d from forgetfulness’. Taking Ergasto’s words into consideration, one can presume that, as in the eclogue, so in *Phillis*, while ‘the scene is olde, the words be newe’. The idea visibly emerges in the last sonnet of *Phillis*, where, in spite of acknowledging the use of others’ poetry as model, Lodge explains that these paradigms have ultimately proved ineffective for his own poetic enterprise:

Resembling none, and none so poore as I,
Poore to the world, and poore in each esteeme,
Whose first borne loues, at first obscurd did die,
And bred no fame but flame of bace misdeeme.
Under the Ensigne of whose tyred pen,
Loues legions forth have maskt, by others masked:
Think how I lyve wronged by ill tonged men,
Not Maister of my selfe, to all wrongs tasked. (40.1–8, sig. H3r)

For Lodge, the real substance of poetic creativity rests on the poet's literary experience, an experience that springs from his own aptitudes.
and the practice of *imitatio*, and that is necessarily enmeshed with a
discussion of the real significance of imitation, inspiration and poetic
imagination for literary creation. Ironically enough, perhaps the mean-
ing of *Phillis* could lie in the blending of exercises in *imitatio* with
poems triggered by Lodge’s particular Muse. In this regard, it is per-
haps no coincidence that, in the first and last sonnet of the sequence,
Lodge confirms that his poetry, albeit grounded in the verse of other
writers, certainly needs to have its own essence, its own Muse. The for-
mae employed by other poets cannot be valid to depict the particular
situation of Damon and Phillis. Therefore, in the same way that he
claims to ‘lyve wronged by ill tonged men, / Not Master of my selfe,
to all wrongs tasked’, he can also admit that, if he wants to produce
the singularising poetry that Phillis deserves, only his own experience
will permit his muse to rise ‘beyond our Poets pitches’ (1.7, sig. B2r) –
even if this implies his literary creation to be inferior in quality when
compared to other models. Overall, as Sidney similarly urged in son-
net 1 of *Astrophil and Stella*, Lodge advocates a poetry inspired by
true feeling:

Oh pleasing thoughts, apprentices of loue,
...  
Rowse you my muse beyond our Poets pitches,
...  
Show to the world tho poore and scant my skill is,
How sweet thoughts be, that are but thought on *Phillis*. (1.1, 7, 13–14,
sig. H3r)

In this first sonnet, Lodge confirms that the distinctive character of his
sonnet sequence is achieved because the real experience of the poet pre-
vails over a deluding idea of inspiration and the works of the ‘poetic
predecessors responsible for some sort of “anxiety of influence”, from
whose “pre-text” a poet will emancipate his own heart-felt writing’.31
As Harbicht explains, this is something that Sidney, Daniel and Dray-
ton do with ‘no small degree of self-assurance’,32 and Lodge, absorbed
by the tradition, clung to the same idea. Not only is this evident in
*Phillis*. In one of the ‘Sundrie sweete Sonnets’ appended to *Scillaes
Metamorphosis*, Lodge shuns others’ poetry not simply because it is
inadequate to depict his love, but because it has proved deceptive:
‘Goe lying books, cease fooles to boast your art, / And marke the
cause: my Mistres smiles and lowres / Makes cleere the heauens, &
clowdes my heart with showers’.33 In sonnet 16 of *Phillis* Lodge simi-
larly concludes that, as it stands, poetical conventions cannot offer the
devices and acuteness needed to give shape to the hardship suffered by the poet:

I part (oh death) for why this world containes,
More care, and woe then with dispaire remains,
Oh loath depart wherein such sorrowes dwell,
As all conceites are scant the same to tell. (16.17–20, sig. D2v)

At any rate, the belief that experience is the sustenance of poetry is what really marks Phillis in the same way that it marks, for instance, the opening of Astrophil and Stella or Licia. Only the ‘pleasing thoughts’ on Phillis that open the sequence can really rouse Lodge’s ‘muse beyond our Poets pitches’; otherwise the poet would be unable to display his poetic competence. No matter if this is ‘poore and scant’, what counts is its authenticity, because it is grounded in true sentiments and in Phillis as the only possible source of inspiration. As he affirms in sonnet 4, ‘none wrights [writes] with truer faith, or greater love’ (4.13, sig. B4v), and it is this love that precisely commands him to write, as he also suggests in sonnet 1: ‘and working wonders yet say all is duty’ (1.8, sig. B2r). Sonnet 8 is the most comprehensible example illustrating the pre-eminence of experience in writing poetry. In this sonnet, after displaying a clear Petrarchan blazon, Lodge suggests that literary creation directly depends on the material experience of the poet:

No starres hir eyes to cleere the wandering night,
But shining sunnes of true divinitye:
That make the soule conceiue hir perfect light:
No wanton beauties of humanitie
Hir prettie browes, but beames that cleare the sight
Of him that seekes the true Philosophie:
No Corrall is hir lippe, no rose hir faire,
But even that crimson that adornes the Sunne
No Nimph is she, but mistresse of the ayre,
By whom my glories are but newe begunne,
But when I touch and tast as others do,
I then shall wright and you shall wonder to. (8, sig. C2v)

In this sonnet Lodge has imitated the convention of the blazon, describing Phillis’s beauty in the Petrarchan style. However, the last two lines imply that this imitation is far from perfection, for it is founded on a pretended idea of Phillis’s beauty. In imitating this model, Lodge has created a conventional literary image of Phillis,
but this image is dependent on a stereotyped – and to some extent worn-out – pattern that constrains Lodge's invention and aspirations to surpass mere theoretical and multifunctional models. It is not the Petrarchan idealised image of Phillis on which the force of his poetry should be based, but on touching and tasting her, that is, on real and material experience. Only his own experiences – based on, though emancipated from, convention – can really imprint a distinctive quality on his poetry, the distinctiveness needed to validate its own essence, as he claims in the first and last sonnet of the sequence.

The relevance given to experience is a subject likewise examined by other Elizabethan writers. In canzon 3 of *Parthenophil and Parthenophe* (1593), after displaying a sort of Petrarchan blazon, Barnes explains that his Muses feed on the nectar that seeps through the beloved’s lips. By comparing Parthenope’s lips with grapes, Barnes thus develops a conceit that proves how a kiss substantiates the dependence of poetry on actual experience, just as Lodge does. Madrigal 18 likewise illustrates that physicality stimulates inspiration. In this particular example, Barnes’s inspiration is fired up by the materiality of a flower that symbolises the loving encounter. When the poet is able to touch, taste and smell the bud, his Muse is encouraged to preserve this experience as its substance or ‘theames’: ‘Whose fauour, sappe, and sauour my sence reaues. / My muse hath these for theames, / They to my muse, my muse to the defence’. A kiss from Parthenope is again the cause for the literary response of the poet in madrigal 16. However, Barnes introduces here a slight variation, because the joy caused by the kiss must be kept secret as part of the *furtivus amor* topos: ‘No man can speake those ioyes, / then muse be mute: But say, for sight, smell, hearing, tast, and tuch, / In any one thing, was there ever such?’ Though contrary to the formula employed in canzon 3, the restraint of the Muse in the madrigal similarly corroborates that experience is the trigger of poetry. In a similar, yet sardonic way William Percy asks his Muse in *Coelia* to be silent in order to conceal an episode that immediately kindled his inventiveness. When Coelia treads on the poet in sonnet V, he interprets this as a love encounter that once more is cause for poetical inspiration. Still, like Barnes in madrigal 16, Percy must restrain this enthusiasm to conceal the excitement caused by this experience. And as in *Licia* Fletcher coincides with Lodge and Barnes in ascribing to the poet’s own experiences the stimulus to write, so in the epistle to the reader he attributes the amorous tone of his poetry to his state of mind. Because he is in love, he feels inclined to write exclusively love poems, which ‘I did it onlelie to trie my humour’.
Though more indirectly and in a different manner, the first eclogue of *Phillis* also examines this notion of the poet’s experience as essential for poetical invention. There Damon and the old shepherd Demades debate on the value of love and its function as fuel for poetry. Demades’s age and experience have made him sceptical about the actual worth of love, whereas Damon, deeply captivated by Phillis, argues for the contrary by affirming that ‘Spring flowers, sea-tides, earth grasse, skie stars shal banish, / Before the thoughtes of loue or *Phillis* vanish’, and so he is determined to keep his love alive even if this only makes him ‘weep thy [his] woes unto the winde’ (‘Egloga Prima’, 143–4, sig. E3v). Damon finds in his love for Phillis a sound reason for his invention: ‘All hope (but future hope to be renouned, / For weeping *Phillis*) shall in tears be drowned’ (‘Egloga Prima’, 113–14, sig. E2r). Damon thus validates his affection as the basis for his literary creation, a creation whose material fruit will prove perpetual.

Although – if obviously more implicitly than in sonnet 8 – this dialogue evinces the relevance of experience for literary creation, what really calls our attention is the manner in which the conversation defines this experience. Demades affirms that it is Damon’s own arrogance as potential lover – and accordingly poet – that envisions the experience that prompts him to write. He argues that Damon pretends to be in love so as to have a good excuse for writing – just as Fletcher also wrote ‘onelie to trie my humour’:

The vaine Idea of this dietie
Nurst at the teate of thine Imagination:
Was bred brought, vp by thine owne vanitie,
Whose being thou mayest curse from the creation:
And so thou list, thou maiest as soone forget loue,
As thou at first didst fashion and beget loue. (‘Egloga Prima’, 49–54, sig. E1r)

With these lines, Demades argues that poets simulate affections with the sole purpose of having an apparently solid and real basis on which to found their poetry. Whether Damon’s love is actually feigned or not is not the question here, but the concern shown by Demades with the real nature of this feeling and its connection to poetry certainly interrogates the creative nature of lyric and, more significantly, contradicts what is maintained in sonnet 8 and the other excerpts quoted above. Demades implies that poetry is fiction, and as such it does not necessarily need to depend on real experience. Poetry can
feign passions without the need of feeling them, for, if poetry is only sustained by real affections, poets might then have their inventions curtailed, not being able, as a result, to yield any further kind of lyric not dependent on states of mind:

If *Phillis* loue, loue hir, yet loue hir so:
That if she flye, thou maiest loues fire forgo.

Play with the fire, yet die not in the flame,
Show passions in thy words, but not in heart:
Least when thou think’st to bring thy thoughtes in frame:
Thou proue thy selfe a prisoner by thine Arte.
Play with these babes of loue, as Apes with Glasses,
And put no trust in feathers, winde, or lasses. (‘Egloga Prima’, 131–8, sig. E2r)

Demades’s contention ties in with what is also articulated in the sonnet preceding the eclogue. Despite being quite a literal replica of Ariosto’s sonnet 15, Lodge introduces in sonnet 20 a couple of lines of his own invention – indicated below in italics – that could be read as a preamble to the old shepherd’s idea of poetic discourse:

Some praise the looks, and other praise the lockes,
Of their faire Queenes, *in loue with curious words*:
Some laud the breast where loue his treasure locks,
All like the eie that life and loue affordes.
But none of these fraile beauties and unstable
Shall make *my pen ryot in pompous stile*. (20.1–6, sig. D4v, emphases added)

In this sonnet, the lover distances himself from poets ‘in loue with curious words’ who praise the outward beauty of their beloved by rioting ‘in pompous style’. Just as in other moments of the sequence or even as Sidney in sonnet 1, Lodge rejects ‘the letter for the spirit, or the appearance for the reality’ with the sole intention of valuing the moral beauty of his mistress. Yet these lines are particularly revealing when read in connection with Demades’s claim, for the phrase ‘in loue with curious words’ besides suggests, as Luis-Martínez explains, that poets are ‘endowed with the ability to rehearse “love’s use”, to make desire the subject of *delocution*. ’ In short, the love displayed by these other poets is simply reduced to an exhibition of their poetic skills, thus insinuating, as Demades equally maintains, that poets pretend to be in love so that they have an excuse to write
poetry. Hence Demades’s demand for a poetry disenfranchised from sentiments. In consequence, it is not surprising that he urges Damon to use his lyrical abilities with other aims, advising him to ‘bende thy [his] Muse to matters farre more fitte’ and

Cast hence this Idle fuel of desire,
That feedes that flame wherein they heart consumeth:
Let reason schoole thy will wich doth aspire,
And counsel coole impatience that presumeth:
Driue hence vaine thoughtes which are fond loues abetters;
For he that seeks his thraldoome merits fetters. (‘Egloga Prima’, 43–38, sig. D4v)

On the whole, Demades’s protest functions as counterpoint to the idea that poetry should emerge from authenticity, a notion similarly considered, for example, by Watson, who in Hekatompathia revealed ‘that his passions were invented’ and ‘his borrowings of them from other writers’, or Sidney, who exploited the arbitrary fictionality of literary texts in The Old Arcadia and Astrophil and Stella.43 Demonstration of this idea also occurs in sonnets 100 and 101 of Wittes Pilgrimage (1605) by John Davies of Hereford: ‘Why sing I then in this too loving Straine / When Loue, and I do so vnkindly iar?’, ‘Thus far may Speculation help a Wit / Unapt for Love, to write of Loves estate / Thus far can Art extend his Benefit / Past Natures Bounds, in shew of Love, or Hate’.44 Even Giles Fletcher interrogated the validity of such a principle when he suggested that it is possible for an author to write about things unknown to him: ‘Yet take this by the waie, though I am so liberall to graunt thus much, a man may write of love, and not bee in love, as well as of husbandrie, and not goe to plough: or of witches and be none: or of holinesse and be flat prophane.’45 A poet’s invention is not necessarily triggered by actuality, because poetry, ultimately being a mental fabrication, proves in itself a genuine subjective experience. Demades’s remarks therefore upend the idea that, for poetry to acquire a distinctive touch, the poet should draw on personal experience. In so doing, Lodge interrogates the real nature of poetic invention, rendering it a genuinely subjective experience: it is as genuine when it depends on the writer’s lived materiality as when it is a product of the imagination. Similarly, when Drayton concluded that ‘My Verse is the true image of my Mind’,46 he could not have defined with more accuracy the subjective quality of poetry.

It has been already argued that The Complaint of Elstred has been taken by modern scholars as an unconnected poem, added later to
the sequence solely in order to participate in the Elizabethan craze for sonnet sequences. Recent research on Elizabethan poetry has drawn attention to the ‘early modern predilection for bringing out volumes that link sonnet sequences to other texts, especially narratives’, and has endeavoured to explain the logic of this structure. Modelling the term on Daniel’s sequence, Katherine Duncan-Jones and John Kerrigan called this the ‘Delian’ structure, which, characterised by the combination of a sonnet sequence with an ode and a closing narrative complaint, served as the basis for the analogous tripartite structure of other sonnet series such as Phillis, Fletcher’s Licia, Richard Barnfield’s Cynthia (1595) or Robert Lynche’s Diella (1596). Scholars such as Duncan-Jones, Kerrigan, Thomas P. Roche, Stephen Guy-Bray, Georgia Brown and Marcy L. North have attempted to read a thematic progression in these sequences. These authors have underscored, for instance, the relevant function of introductory sonnets that ‘acknowledge the scope and labor of the project’, and of the long closing poems that, as a sort of coda, either abound in the subject matter of the sonnets or propose a resolution to the problems previously posed in the sequence – especially evident in the different readings of The Complaint of Rosamond.

Additionally, the materiality of the sequences reinforces these assumptions. Kavita Mudan Finn has stressed, for example, that in the particular case of Phillis, its printer, John Busby, closely followed the typographical choices employed in Delia, ‘deliberately placing Lodge’s poems within the same visual framework as Daniel’s’. Moreover, with the focus placed on the relation between gender and paratext in Elizabethan complaints, Danielle Clarke has argued that Phillis, as well as the sonnet sequences of Daniel or Drayton, ‘carry title-pages that suggest the integral importance of these poems [the complaints] to the volumes’. Juliet Fleming has further suggested that, although ornament borders were frequently used by Elizabethan printers to separate short poems from the rest of the sequence, ‘in other cases the use of borders is continued, in whole or in part, across some or all of the other textual units in the same volume’. Fleming thus claims that such a practice suggests that ‘flowers were used, not to mark the single page as the territory of a single sonnet, but to articulate the composition and identity of the entire printed volume as something more than the sum of its parts’. In agreement with Fleming, Clarke maintains that the layout of Phillis – which is partly characterised by the use of arabesques – gestures towards this combinatorial pattern to mark the transition between the diverse
poems and the complaint, which, as she explains, becomes an integral part of the whole sequence:

The transition to ‘The Complaint of Elstred’ is marked by a mediating ‘Ode’, and the use of a different flower, but is concluded not with another flower, but with ‘FINIS’. In this way, the female-voiced text is presented as having a coherence and integrity of its own, and as having a loosely defined relationship to the rest of the volume.56

In line with these assumptions, I would like to underscore, however, that not only the tripartite structure and the materiality of the sequence justify the internal coherence and the integrity of *The Complaint of Elstred* in *Phillis*. I also believe that *Elstred* is an integral part of the sequence because it builds upon the questions about poetic creativity discussed in the previous poems. As the title indicates, the closing complaint tells the story of Elstred, who, as a result of the vicissitudes of life, becomes King Locrinus’s concubine. Elstred begets an illegitimate daughter with Locrinus, Sabrina, who, like her mother, is sentenced to death when Gwendoleen, Locrinus’s lawful wife, becomes queen after fighting and defeating the king in an attempt to preserve her honour and position. Most of this tragic story is told by Elstred herself, whose spectre and that of her daughter surface at the river where the poet – who in the fictional context of the sequence we presume to be Damon57 – bemoans his unrequited love.

Although Elstred is the unquestionable protagonist of the story, for the present purposes I would like to draw attention to Sabrina, as her brief though relevant part in the narrative enters into a conversation with Damon and Demades, and extends the enquiries into creativity, experience and imagination previously examined in the sequence. From the moment Sabrina is first introduced, she is objectified as a trophy of Locrinus and Elstred’s ‘tryumph and good speede’ (*CE*, 328, sig. K3v) and, significantly enough, as a text written by her father: ‘Looke how in royall characters inchased, / She beares the records of his [Locrinus] haughty hart’ (*CE*, 523–4, sig. L3v). Thus reified, Sabrina is not allowed to take an active part in the story. When Locrinus is slain, the most she can do, as Elstred tells it, is to literally replicate her mother’s words and gestures:

I faynting fell, enfeebled through my sufferaunce,
My child that saw me fall, for griefe fell by me:
I wept, she cryde, both gauw grieue sustenaunce,
Thomas Lodge’s ‘Supple Muse’ 231

I fainted, and she fainting layd her nie me.
Euen what I kyst, she kist, and what I sayd
She sayd, and what I fear’d, made her afrayd.

For every sigh, a sigh, for every teare,
A teare, she was no niggard of her moane. (CE, 433–40, sig. L1r)

As a text, Sabrina can only echo Elstred’s actions and words until, at the end of the narration, she demands to speak for herself and give her own account of the story, which she does in the last ten stanzas:

Yea Mother so I cry’d, said Sabrine tho.
Oh let me now no longer sorrow smother,
But by my selfe capitulate my woe:
Since none are fit, or meetest to reueale it,
Then those who like my selfe, doe likewise feele it. (CE, 542–6, sig. L3r)

What Sabrina experiences somehow mirrors Lodge’s practice in the composition of Phillis, especially as described in sonnets 1, 8, 40 and the first eclogue. On the one hand, Lodge openly – yet without making specific reference, in contrast to, for instance, Fletcher – imitates other European writers, just as Sabrina mimics Elstred. However, on the other hand, our poet also reveals the efforts made to furnish his poetry with a distinctive flavour, acknowledging as part of this process both the usefulness and ineffectiveness of others’ poetry. As text, Sabrina similarly paraphrases Elstred’s discourse until she is eventually empowered to report the events by herself. Sabrina demands a voice of her own and, as a consequence, argues that only a first-person narrative voiced by the protagonist of the story – or, at least, by someone who has endured a comparable situation – can truly convey her experiences. With this assertion, Sabrina brings into focus the two shepherds’ dialogue about the real nature of poetic invention and whether this should be based on real experience. Sabrina insists that her story needs to be told from her lived experience.

Nonetheless, paradoxically enough, her story is actually told by a mediating poet. After all, the voice that Sabrina claims for herself is the voice which must arise from the poet’s compassion:58

I thus we dyed, yet not with selfe like same,
For floting Seuernes loues Sabrinaes name.
So may he prattle still vnto his vvaue,
Sabrinaes name, whilst brine salt teares sea weepeth:
And if the Gods or men compassion haue,
Compassion that vith tender hearts nere sleepeith,
We both shall liue. (CE, 593–9, sig. L4r)

Despite her efforts to have their story told from her own perspective, Sabrina knows that only the work of a poet can guarantee the perpetuation of their tale. In this sense, the passage also stresses the conviction that poetry is the instrument to make stories permanent, as permanent as Sabrina has become thanks to the jingle resonating in the Severn. Not without reason, she is the only character to be objectified as a text in the complaint. Sabrina’s name has been perpetuated by the river, while her story will subsist through poetry. It is this poetic materialisation of Elstred and Sabrina’s tale that ultimately serves to prove – as Demades explains to Damon – that a poet’s invention does not need to emerge from his own experiences. By recognising that the poet is the one who will eventually convey their tragedy, Elstred’s daughter incidentally underscores the subjectivity of poetical invention. Sabrina, we presume, addresses her plea to Damon, who closes the complaint – and indeed the sequence – with the promise of recording their story: ‘And I gotte home and weepingly thus pend it, / Carelesse of those that scorne and cannot mend it’ (CE, 605–6, sig. L5v). With this assertion, Damon boosts the debate on the actual origin of poetic invention. His account of Elstred’s story ratifies, as Demades implied, that the work of a poet does not need to arise from experience. Yet it is no less true that these lines actually result from his personal reaction to Elstred and Sabrina’s report and are the product of his own feelings towards the two women.

By literally exemplifying the preceding discussion on poetic invention, the end of *The Complaint of Elstred* thus strengthens the internal logic of *Phillis*, while it confirms that the whole sequence can certainly be measured from a perspective that helps to uncover Lodge’s interrogations into poetic theory. Whereas in *Astrophil and Stella* Sidney was ‘faced with the irony that what each sonnet represented as the truth of his love had not happened at all’ and with the fact that ‘the cries of despair and black fits of woe had not been uttered as he wrote them’,59 Fletcher, on the other hand, justified the amorous mood of *Licia* on the grounds that he ‘onely had leasure to growe passionate’, and excused the poor literary value of his sonnet sequence by arguing that ‘if any man measure my affection by my style, let him say, I am in Love’.60 In a similar vein, by likewise approaching these two opposing attitudes in *Phillis*, and literally
materialising them in the final complaint, Lodge shows a concern with the creative basis of poetry, whose substance, he seems to propose, rests on a complex combination of imitation, experience, creativity and subjectivity.

Overall, this idea of poetry derives from what in the title of this chapter, using John Davies’s expression from *Orchestra, or A Poeme of Dauncing* (1596), I call the poet’s ‘supple muse’.61 This expression condenses the major points of what could be considered Lodge’s unwritten poetics. On the one hand, the idea of the Muse comprises questions about inspiration, creativity and experience alluded to in a number of his poems. On the other hand, the adjective ‘supple’, meaning either obedient or flexible, actually defines the standpoint from which these questions are tackled. In *Phillis*, Lodge confirms that regular imitation in poetical composition has limitations that can only be overcome by creativity, experience and innovation, that is, by the idea of a Muse, or imaginative competence, as ‘Camelion-like’ as, in the words of Davies, Astrophil’s ‘supple muse’. In this context, the dissatisfaction with the Muses that Lodge displays in the second eclogue is all the more revealing. The eclogue begins with the traditional invocation to the Muses similarly used in other moments of the sequence:

Muses helpe me, sorrow, swarmeth,
Eyes are fraught with seas of languish:
Heauie hope my solace harmeth,
Mindes repast is bitter anguish. (‘Egloga Segunda’, 1–4, sig. E4r)

However, although the poet paradoxically allows his lines to run free, he shortly after protests that the Muses seem reluctant to offer him their guidance: ‘Muses if you please to tarry, / Further helpes I meane to borrow’ (19–20, sig. E4r). With these lines Lodge seems to suggest that the role of the Muses as the incarnation of art grounded in tradition and as the sole providers of artistic inspiration is a convention that is by no means inviolable. In its place, what basically prevail in poetical composition are those ‘further helpes’ which, as implied in certain passages of the sequence, materialise in the poet’s own capability and experience. In letting his lines flow without the assistance of the Muses, the poet proves that his state of mind is ultimately the impelling cause for the writing of poetry, just as Damon in the eclogue or Fletcher in the preamble to *Licia* argued. Yet it should not be overlooked that Fletcher’s contention conversely rests on a ‘pretence to authenticity of emotion’62 similarly stressed by Demades when he hints at the fictional nature of poetic creation.
Taken as a whole, Lodge’s implicit reflections in *Phillis* on the significance of inspiration, imitation and imagination certainly enter into conversation with Elizabethan readings of the nature of poetry, while they also unveil an internal logic for his sequence, especially measured by the materialisation of this discussion in the final complaint. After all, just like his contemporaries, Lodge discards a notion of poetic imagination grounded merely in the execution of pre-established models elucidated in treatises of poetry or in the works of celebrated authors, and engages instead in offering perspectives on the meaning of experience with regard to poesis. Inventive creativity ceases to be decided by models and worn-out conceits that prove insufficient for the poet’s lyrical project, because, as indicated in sonnet 1, Lodge’s Muse certainly must rise ‘beyond our Poets pitches’. Whether this imaginative competence should be based on real experience or on poetical precepts disenchanted from affection is the question that Lodge tries to answer in *Phillis*. Hence, when he affirms in the dedication to the Countess of Shrewsbury that in his poems he promises ‘as much in affection as any other can perform in perfection’ (sig. A3r), he is perhaps solving the dilemma, and, like Damon, ignoring the opinion of those who, like Demades, ‘scorne and cannot mend it’. The entire debate in *Phillis* then rests on whether good poetry can truly emerge from affections: whether his Muses, as the poetic voice concludes in the second eclogue, really ‘leave their wonted uses’ when the poet ‘leave[s] to bee a lover’ (‘Egloga Secunda’, 63–4, sig. E5r), or whether this masquerade is just part of the poetic fiction, as Sidney, Fletcher, Watson and other sonneteers similarly whispered in their verses.

Notes

5. See Neely, ‘Structure of English Renaissance Sonnet Sequences’; see also Webster, ‘The Methode of a Poete’.
7. Ibid., 368.
8. Ibid.
14. Apparently, Lodge had good relations with Drayton, to whom he addressed one of the epistles included in A Fig for Momus (1595), sigs. H3v–H4r, and whom in 1596 he described as ‘diligent and formal’ (Wits Misery, sig. IIr).
15. Lodge, A Fig for Momus, sig. A4v.
16. Lodge, Wits Misery, sig. IIr.
17. Lodge, A Reply to Gosson, sigs. C6r–C6v.
18. Lodge, A Fig for Momus, sig. A4v. See White, Plagiarism and Imitation, 110.
26. Lodge, A Fig for Momus, sig. A4r.
27. This is a topic amply discussed by Puttenham in The Art of English Poesy (1589) and by John Harrington in the preface to his version of Orlando Furioso (1591). Both writers draw attention to the flaws of imitation and coincide in explaining that the shortcomings of imitation happen when authors use imitation as plain misappropriation in place of the kind of borrowing which, through individual reinterpretation, rewriting and adaptation – procedures which definitely involve invention – should be actually enmeshed in the practice of imitation – or we should rather say emulation – as endorsed by the Elizabethans.
29. Lodge, Phillis . . . Where unto is Annexed, The Tragicall Complaynt of Estred, ‘The Induction’, 28, sig. B1v. Further references to this volume are given parenthetically in the text. For Phillis, sonnet and line numbers, or poem title and line number, are followed by signature. For The Complaint of Elstred, the abbreviation CE is followed by line number and signature.
30. These lines from the eclogue somehow resume the theme of Shakespeare’s sonnet 76, in which, in words of Duncan-Jones, he apologises ‘for the stylistic monotony of his verse’ (Shakespeare’s Sonnets, ed. Duncan-Jones, 262). Although his intention is to carry on writing about his love, Shakespeare complains that the best he can do is ‘dressing old words new, / Spending again what is already spent’ (76.11–12). As instigator of poetry love eschews innovation because it is an unmovable and constant feeling, not inclined to change or novelty. In a similar way, as Ergasto implies, the substance of poetry remains unalterable, being only modified on its appearance.

32. Ibid.
33. Lodge, Scillaes Metamorphosis, sonnet 3.8–10, sig. E4r.
34. Ibid., sonnet 1.8, sig. B2r.
35. See Barnes, Parthenophil, canzon 3.20–6, ed. Doyno, 113.
36. Ibid., madrigal 18.9–11, p. 60.
37. Ibid., madrigal 16.26–8, p. 58.

40. This is a pivotal question for Sidney’s idea of poetry, whose matter, as he affirms, is ‘quodlibet indeed’. See Sidney, Defence, in Miscellanea Prose, ed. Duncan-Jones and van Dorsten, 112.11.
41. Evans, ‘In Love with Curious Words’, 125.
42. Luis-Martínez, ‘Shakespeare’s Wicked Pronoun’, 141.
44. Davies (of Hereford), Wittes Pilgrimage, sonnets 100.1–2, and 101.1–4, sig. H3r.
47. Dubrow, ‘Dressing old words new?’, 90.
51. See Guy-Bray, ‘Rosamond’s Complaint’; Davies, The Countesse of Pembroke’s Arcadia and the Invention of English Literature; and Fleming,
‘Changed Opinion as to Flowers’. Heather Dubrow has suggested instead that this design is perhaps more amorphous than has customarily been assumed, since a publisher’s or printer’s decisions could have easily altered authorial intentions in establishing structure. Dubrow maintains that ‘the critical tendency to impose on collections of sonnets the type of linearity that encourages us to think in terms of “sonnet sequences” rather than “sonnet cycles” . . . not coincidentally mirrors the desire to read such collections of sonnets in terms of a linear relationship with the poems or poems that follow them’. As an alternative, she argues that ‘always based on a structure in which texts offer substitute visions and genres, often impelled by a latent agenda of replacing one emotion or interpretation with a more acceptable one, the books not only stage but also thematize many visions of surrogacy’, and so, she continues, one can conclude that the closing poem in a ‘volume offers not a resolution of the problems in the sonnet sequence but rather a demonstration of the problematic process of attempting to effect that resolution’ (‘Dressing old words new?’, 95–7).

52. Finn, ‘Of Whom Proud Rome’, 86.
53. Clarke, ‘Signifying’, 136. The particular case of Drayton seems more problematic. As a result of his constant revision of the sonnets, there must have been copies where the sonnets were not bound with his poem Matilda. For a detailed discussion of this, see Shakespeare’s Sonnets, ed. Duncan-Jones, esp. 13–17.
54. Fleming, ‘Changed Opinion as to Flowers’, 56.
55. Ibid.
56. Clarke, ‘Signifying’, 145.
57. The setting is unquestionably similar to that described at the end of the ‘Egloga Secunda’.
58. A similar situation occurs in Daniel’s The Complaint of Rosamond (1592). In this poem, Rosamond asks the poet to write her story so it is not forgotten and can work as an example to Delia: ‘Which seene with grieve, my myserable ghost, / . . . Comes to solicit thee, since other faile, / To take this taske, and in thy wofull Song / To forme my case, and register my wrong’ (29–35, in Daniel, Poems and the Defence of Rhyme, ed. Sprague, 40).
59. Spiller, Development of the Sonnet, 111.
60. Fletcher, Licia, ‘To . . . the Ladie Mollineux’, in English Works, 75.
61. ‘Yet Astrophell might one for all suffize, / Whose supple Muse Camelion-like doth change / Into all formes of excellent devise’ (Davies, Orchestra, 130.1–3, in Poems, ed. Krueger, 125).