

Careless Engagements:
Literature, Science, and the Ethics of Indifference in Early Modernity

by

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Abstract

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This project offers a new interpretation of the beginnings of experimental science in seventeenth-century England, arguing that an emergent interest in states of muted feeling enabled the epistemological breakthroughs of Francis Bacon's "great instauration." I propose that ethical reflection on peaceful "nonchalance" (to use Michel de Montaigne's term) catalyzed scientific innovation: Baconian intellectuals (a category that includes theologians, essayists, and poets, as well as natural philosophers) advocated a state of heightened receptivity predicated on effortless serenity of mind, suggesting that cognitive freedom (from Aristotelian dogma and the prejudicial illusions of common sense) could only be achieved by surrendering the teleology of desire, especially the desire for certainty. By aligning Baconian experimentalism with neo-Stoicism, previous scholars have evaded the paradox at its heart. In fact, experimentalists differentiated their own brand of casual indifference from Stoic obstinacy, favoring the leisurely attention of carelessness over the arduous self-discipline of sheer dispassion. By promoting the cultivation of an experience defined by its uncultivated nature, experimentalists created a practical quandary. I explore the capacity of literary form to solve that problem: new literary genres made it possible for readers to experience the sensory awareness and cognitive flexibility on which the new science depended.

My argument shows that the motifs of "progress" and "method" that organize discussions of seventeenth-century intellectual history, with their suggestion that scientific modernity took its bearings from the imposition of instrumental reason on philosophical inquiry (both its experimental procedures and its manner of accumulating data over time), grossly misrepresent the ethos of experimentalism. Andrew Marvell's self-portrait as a "careless" natural philosopher who "languish[es] with ease" while inspecting and transforming his surroundings with the help of "multiplying glasses" captures the actual interest of scientists like Robert Boyle in risky states of subtle pleasure in which the mind wanders from its habitual course—an errancy John Milton's

Son exemplifies. A better understanding of the origins of modern science requires an attention to waywardness and lapses of discipline, antitypes of “progress” and “method” that reframe the latter as fantasies of order that obscure a history in which scientists and likeminded intellectuals savored the disorder of experience and placed their trust in its capacity to yield insight.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	ii
Preface	
Ethics Made Easy: On the Limits of Emotional Exertion	iv
I. Montaigne’s Weakness: Toward an Ethics of “Nonchalance”	v
II. Against Emotional Management: The Passions at the Threshold of Physiology	xiii
III. Indifference to Anxiety: A Future for the Theory of Emotion	xvii
Chapter 1	
The Montaignian Moment: On the Affect of Baconian “Advancement”	1
I. <i>Sprezzatura</i> ’s Afterlife: Leisurely Exertions of the Experimentalist	4
II. Montaigne’s Lucretius; or, What is Emotional Pacifism?	9
III. “Le premier que je rencontre”: Montaigne’s Epistemology of Proximity	18
IV. “Good in Itself Simply”: Bacon and Montaigne’s <i>Pas de Deux</i>	29
Chapter 2	
Literary Theory for Scientists: Robert Boyle’s “Loose and Desultory Way of Writing”	39
I. “Something by Way of Method”: The Science of Boyle’s <i>Reflections</i>	42
II. “Syrup of Violets”: On the Pleasures of Post-Humanist Literary Theory	47
III. Easy Feelings: Affect without Effort in the <i>Reflections</i>	56
IV. “Suppleness” and the Agency of “Chance”	60
V. Conclusion / Interlude: “Parcels of Time”	65
Chapter 3	
“Languishing with Ease”: Injury and Inquiry at Marvell’s Nun Appleton	67
I. Anatomy of an Afterthought: “To His Coy Mistress”	74
II. Nun Appleton: An Inverted Fortress	82
III. Carelessness as Receptivity	88
IV. Blurred Apocalypse: Optical Effects of Marvell’s Insouciance	92
Chapter 4	
“None Opposite”: Undialectical Milton	101
I. Friendly Foils: The Stoic and the Jew	105
II. Cursing the Day: Job’s Dialectic	113
III. Rereading <i>Paradise Regain’d</i> : Some Critical Appraisals	119
IV. Soft Differences: Milton’s “Calmer Voyage”	122
V. <i>Paradise Regain’d</i> and the Epistemology of Temptation	130
Works Cited	142

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Preface

Ethics Made Easy: On the Limits of Emotional Exertion

Mon dessein est de passer doucement, et non
laborieusement, ce qui reste de vie...
—Montaigne, “Des Livres” (1580)

Offering to every weary Travailler,
His orient liquor in a Crystal Glasse...
—Milton, *A Masque Presented at
Ludlow Castle* (1634)

My study of the interrelation of literature and science in early modernity explores a tradition of ethical reflection that grants epistemological value to experiences of casual indifference. One of my aims is simply to excavate this tradition from texts in which it has remained unnoticed. Another goal is to unsettle the literary history of early modern England and, to a lesser extent, France. As highly developed a field as Early Modern Studies cannot simply have missed a sophisticated strain of reflection on the passions; its neglect is not an oversight, but a blindness that inheres in the basic set of assumptions that governs research on the history of emotion. Much of my preface is devoted to this issue: I seek to explain why existing histories cannot accommodate a poetics of casual indifference. Throughout, my interests are both ethical and epistemological: an interest in “emotional pacifism” yields a mode of receptivity on which scientific discovery comes to depend. Because my long first chapter clarifies the epistemological stakes of my project in the context of the history of science, my focus in this preface is the specifically ethical dimension of casual indifference.

My first order of business is to offer a provisional description of the state of feeling I have in mind, using Michel de Montaigne as a point of departure. Historically speaking, it is Montaigne who first draws a connection between ethical engagement, epistemological openness, and weakness of feeling, in contradistinction to the deliberate suppression of the passions promoted by the Stoics. My project acquires richness of historical detail as it travels to England, where, by the middle of the seventeenth century, indifference has taken center stage in a culture profoundly transformed by Bacon’s experimental science. Experimentalism, by which I refer loosely to the constellation of intellectuals who draw inspiration from Bacon’s natural philosophy, and which I understand as a conversation with Montaigne, is not the consolidation of a uniform science but the scene of a nuanced investigation of the ethical and epistemological consequences of muted feeling. If I have spoken of my research as a recovery project, it is not because I believe that what I call “experimentalist affect” is merely an artifact of early modern literary and scientific cultures. On the contrary, I suggest that it reorients the interdisciplinary conversation about affect that has been rapidly gaining ground over the past decade.

I. Montaigne's Weakness: Toward an Ethics of "Nonchalance"

When Michel de Montaigne returned to his *Essais* in 1588, revising and expanding the original edition of 1580, and as he continued to alter all three volumes in the last four years of his life (1588-92), his brief reflection on the ethics and practical difficulties of lying underwent a dramatic transformation. As usual, Montaigne's editorial practice consisted only of addition, modifying the first version of "Des Menteurs" (Book I, Chapter IX) with supplementary digressions, citations, and turns of phrase. Less predictable was Montaigne's narrow focus. Although, almost everywhere in this chapter, he edits with a light touch, subtly adjusting the texture of the original by extending a few lines of argument, offering new illustrations, and adding punctuation, one section in particular becomes an object of sustained attention.¹ Montaigne fills the space between the first two paragraphs with a protracted digression on his character, which is also a meditation on his writing style, and then, in those final four years of revision, he scatters further commentary throughout the new excursus. Any reader with the benefit of an annotated edition of the *Essais*, which indicates the three stages of revision, will discover that the chapter is top-heavy: Montaigne's early digression not only offers commentary on the composition of the *Essais*, but also draws the reader's attention to that same issue by asking her to ascend and descend, rapidly and repeatedly, through all the chronological layers of the book's construction.

Before looking more closely at the contents of this redoubled digression, it would be easy, in the present intellectual climate, to venture a provisional description. If Montaigne's writing has become highly self-reflexive, offering an analysis of both the author and his book, and if, as historical evidence shows, this section of the chapter is heavily worked over, the product of repeated rereadings and revisions, then surely it conveys anxiety, indecision, and self-consciousness. The ease with which such a case could be made, even in those critical idioms that insist on the death of the author, is one of the motivations of my project. No argument requires less of a ground, either theoretical or historical, in the humanities today, than the ascription of anxiety to a literary work whose seriousness has been attested by canonization.² I do not withdraw from this

¹ I have benefited from Ullrich Langer's reminder that Montaigne never referred to individual chapters as "essais," though he did use this word to refer more generally to the contents of his book (3). I prefer to speak of "chapters," which promise, in our own, contemporary context, less systematic cohesion than "essays," with the additional benefit of drawing attention to the many "essays"—attempts, weighings, experiments—that comprise each chapter of Montaigne's three-volume project.

² See section III of this preface for an analysis of the centrality of anxiety to recent work in both literary studies and critical theory. For an account of the revision of the *Essais* as a legal necessity, permitting the extension of the publisher's privilege rather than the descent of the book into the public domain, see Hoffmann, who seeks to undermine psychologizing accounts of Montaigne's revisions through an appeal to publication history. Given this gesture, the fact that Hoffmann nonetheless confirms the emotional difficulty with which Montaigne supposedly revises his work indicates the deep entrenchment of the expectation of authorial anxiety in many quarters of literary studies.

premise out of a taste for the counterintuitive; I am neither prickly nor suspicious of academic commonplaces—and indeed, much of this study celebrates the ethical value of mere habit. Montaigne’s long, multifarious introduction to “Des Menteurs” *really does* give the lie to the commonplace—that is, to the notion that the sort of self-reflexivity most associated with the “literary” sits easily, or even automatically, alongside anxious, belabored self-consciousness. Modern assumptions about literary emotion obscure the tonal register of Montaigne’s *Essais*, and the mismatch between Montaigne and his critics is a synecdoche of a larger problem: the resistance of “Des Menteurs” to a description that looks plausible in the scholar’s gaze signals a similar resistance in some of the major literary and philosophical works of early modernity. Beginning with the interpretation of Montaigne currently underway, my project attempts to satisfy the burden of proof such a claim places upon me.

Montaigne obviates the assimilation of his persona to a fretful subjectivity by picturing his qualities and activities, including thinking and writing, as unsought accidents of temperament.³ The curious power of “Des Menteurs” lies in its deliberate failure to deliver the sort of ethical precept it seems poised to offer: ethical imperatives become involuntary, and thus something other than imperative—or imperative in a non-prescriptive way. The chapter reads like a cautionary account of the difficulties of successful lying, but it also makes use of the universalizing rhetoric of ethical counsel: “En verité,” Montaigne writes, “le mentir est un maudit vice. Nous ne sommes hommes et ne nous tenons les uns aux autres que par la parole. Si nous ne connoissons l’horreur et le poids, nous le poursuivrions à feu plus justement que d’autres crimes” (73). Here,

It is easy enough to imagine a less anguished, perhaps even careless, attitude about the constraints of publication.

³ I am aware of the risks of speaking blithely of “subjectivity” in the early modern period. Timothy J. Reiss writes eloquently of the distortions that attend scholars’ observations about “subjects” in a historical context in which distinctively modern understandings of selfhood had yet to coalesce. Because my project is explicitly concerned with theorizing subjectivity, along with emotional experience, it should minimize that kind of distortion. I do not speak in passing of “the subject,” leaving its habitual associations intact; instead, I draw out various conceptions of subjectivity from my objects of inquiry. Those sympathetic with Reiss might draw additional comfort from the tendency of experiences of nonchalance to undermine the modern habit of drawing a sharp boundary between the subject and the exterior. This terminological discussion is equally relevant to readers who are puzzled by my use of terms like “emotion,” “feeling,” “affect,” and “passion.” Because my project theorizes these experiences, I do not run the risk of merely importing the vernacular into my discussion. As I proceed, I opt for terms with connotations that suit my purposes in different contexts—but the bottom line is that a project that theorizes emotion at length will not be able to install its arguments in handy definitions of terms. As a provisional clarification, however, I suggest the following terminological distinctions: Like “affect,” “the passions” call attention to the physiological dimension of feeling, especially in an early modern context. “Emotion,” on the other hand, often suggests a psychological state, while “feeling” emphasizes the interconnection of these categories. In understanding these distinctions, I have benefited from Rei Terada’s *Feeling in Theory: Emotion After the “Death of the Subject.”*

Montaigne sounds a condemnatory note, assuming the pose of the moralist, and for some scholars it is this Montaigne who makes the strongest impression. Steven Shapin quotes these lines for their “brilliant” observations on the destructiveness of lying, reading Montaigne as a social theorist who insightfully recognizes the reliance of the social order on truth-telling (9-10). Shapin is not quite wrong, but the “brilliance” of Montaigne’s discussion is that he cautions the reader against dishonesty while, in the same breath, describing dishonesty as involuntary. After discussing the importance of leading children away from the bad habit of telling lies, Montaigne writes, “...Depuis qu’on a donné ce faux train à la langue, c’est merveille combien il est impossible de l’en retirer” (74). The child who lacks proper training will experience her dishonesty as given.

The same is true for virtue, and here Montaigne draws attention to the physiological dimension of ethics. No reader, no matter how assiduous, could follow Montaigne’s ethical counsel, because virtue befalls the virtuous like fate—or, to borrow his physiological vocabulary, like a hereditary trait. Montaigne presents his honesty as a sign of weakness, a corollary of faulty memory. “Ce n’est pas sans raison,” Montaigne writes, with a double negation that obviates the strong, affirmative thrust one would expect of prescriptive ethics, “qu’on dit que qui ne se sent point assez ferme de memoire, ne se doit pas mesler d’estre menteur” (72).⁴ The chapter opens with the claim that Montaigne’s memory is singularly weak: “Il n’est homme à qui il siese si mal de se mesler de parler de memoire. Car je n’en reconnoy quasi trasse en moy, et ne pense qu’il y en aye au monde une autre si monstrueuse en defaillance” (71). It might be criminal to lie, but Montaigne refrains from lying because he cannot do otherwise. Successful liars depend on strong memories; Montaigne’s “monstrous” weakness protects him from the “horror” of the most antisocial crime. On this subject, he is ironically self-congratulatory: “J’ay toutes mes autres parties viles et communes. Mais en cette-là je pense estre singulier et très rare, et digne de gagner par là nom et reputation” (71). The greatest of ethical achievements is the embarrassing weakness of a congenital defect.

⁴ Montaigne repeats this evasion of the assertiveness inherent in certain vocabularies when he makes use of polyptoton, pushing terms away from their habitual meanings. I am grateful for Andrea Gadberry’s lecture on this topic. Roland Barthes’s reflections on the implicitly affirmative dimension of language in *The Neutral: Lecture Course at the Collège de France (1977-1978)* are also helpful in understanding Montaigne’s strategy. For Barthes, as for Saussure, mere utterance is inherently marked by conflict, in the sense that every word is a choice between “two virtual terms” (7). Thus he “postulates” the neutral as “that which outplays the paradigm” by eluding those binary oppositions that subtend the production of meaning (12, 7). Barthes illuminates the non-assertive quality I observe in Montaigne when, expanding on the notion that utterances are positive by virtue of their exclusion of semantic opposites, he writes, “...the yes (the affirmation) is implicitly inscribed in all of language, while the no requires a special mark at each occurrence....every proposition is assertive (constative), and the modes of doubt, of negation, must be signaled by special marks—while none is needed for affirmation. In borrowing the expression from theology (saint Thomas, Eckhart), we could say that language is *collatio esse*, conferment of being” (42). As my discussion of litotes and polyptoton suggests, Montaigne cultivates phrases that withdraw from the brutal affirmations of speech and writing.

This kind of involuntary virtue is the subject of Montaigne's lengthy digression, his patchwork of musings from different moments in time, which protrudes from between the chapter's first two paragraphs, tempting the literary scholar with the promise of relentless self-examination. Yet the digression defaults on its unwitting promise by making a gesture which is typical of Montaigne's *Essais*: the claim that the author retains a certain "nonchalance" in the face of circumstances that might be expected to knock him off balance. In fact, to speak of nonchalance *is* to speak of involuntary virtue—of modes of action that are unlabored, unintentional, and uncalculated, and perhaps, for these reasons, fail to inhabit the category of action (with its connotations of self-assertion and coordinated movement) after all. Montaigne most explicitly broaches this issue in two places: Book I, Chapter XX, "Que philosophe, c'est apprendre à mourir," where he makes an oft-quoted remark about the conditions under which he wishes to die—"Je veux...que la mort me treuve plantant mes chous, mais nonchalant d'elle, et encore plus de mon jardin imparfait" (134-5)—and Book III, Chapter I, "De l'utile et de l'honneste," where Montaigne describes the style of the *Essais* as a form of "nonchalance" and draws an explicit contrast between his own carefree manner and the hypertrophic passions that have torn France asunder in the context of the *guerres civiles*. The argument I want to foreground here is that Montaigne's easygoing persona exerts pressure—by refraining from exerting pressure—throughout the *Essais*, often in places, like the digression that opens "Des menteurs," where it seems beside the point.

Here, in fact, Montaigne mentions nonchalance only in order to disavow it. "On se prend de mon affection," he writes, "à ma memoire; et d'un defect naturel, on en fait un defect de conscience" (71). His friends question his affections because of his faulty memory, misconstruing disability as disinclination. Montaigne forgets certain obligations, and thus he is taken for a bad friend rather than merely a forgetful one. "Certes," he explains, "je puis aisément oublier, mais de mettre à nonchalloir la charge que mon amy m'a donnée, je ne le fay pas. Qu'on se contente de ma misere, sans en faire une espece de malice, et de la malice autant ennemye de mon humeur" (71). Sure, I forget, Montaigne seems to say, and easily ("aisément") at that—but I am innocent of deliberate forgetting. Montaigne's formulation denies the status of forgetfulness *as action*: "mettre à nonchalloir" construes this uncongenial form of nonchalance as something one decides upon and performs, the verbal phrase suggesting a way of *bracketing* friendship or *setting it aside*. Such an action, Montaigne goes on to explain, would be contrary to his "humeur"—that is, in an early modern vocabulary, to the complexion or temperament determined by the body's balance of humors. The "malice" of a deliberate carelessness would be the "ennemye" of Montaigne's emotional disposition, and yet this disposition, Montaigne reminds the reader throughout the *Essais*, is characterized most distinctly by nothing other than carelessness itself. These claims are only compatible because the digression indicates a distinction between a *verbal* and *adverbial* nonchalance, between *adopting* a certain carelessness and, without calculation, doing something *carelessly*—or, as this particular case suggests, *obliviously*.

Montaigne makes this kind of distinction inevitable by foregrounding the air of indifference he seems to disavow; Montaigne actually quibbles with its presumed *cause* rather than putting its existence into doubt. After all, the passage confirms the behaviors that motivate his friends' accusations: an unusual absorption in the present moment, with little concern for previous engagements; unconcern with the calculations of others as they

maneuver in the social world, along with a lack of personal ambition; and a disregard for the standard responsibilities of friendship. But Montaigne asks the reader to distinguish between forms of indifference in more than one way: the persistence of his careless self-presentation in the face of his rejection of deliberate nonchalance marks off a difference between similar states of unfeeling, while the continuity between the style of this passage and the account of carelessness one finds elsewhere in the *Essais* reinforces the reader's sense that the chapter retains one form of nonchalance even as it discards another. In "De l'utile et de l'honneste," Montaigne describes his writing style as a form of offhanded conversation in which he introduces one line of discussion only to break it off soon after. Similarly, in the second revision of "Des Menteurs," Montaigne writes, "...mon parler...est...court, car le magasin de la memoire est volontiers plus fourny de matiere que n'est celuy de l'invention" (72). In the third round or revision, he appends the following explanation to the foregoing sentence: "si elle [la memoire] m'eust tenu bon, j'eusse assourdi tous mes amys de babil, les subjects esveillans cette telle quelle faculté que j'ay de les manier et employer, eschauffant et attirant mes discours" (72). Montaigne thinks and speaks in jolts, drawing only on the powers of "invention"; were memory to serve him better, his discourse would run on endlessly, deafening his friends—losing his readers' interest?—drawn on by the "heat" of remembered examples or lines of reasoning. Playing on the meaning of "invention," Montaigne places emphasis on the freshness and novelty of the kind of thinking and writing one finds in the *Essais*: the term points to the *inventio* of the rhetorical tradition, in which memory is exactly the place one goes to find the *topoi* or commonplaces with which powerful arguments are constructed, and yet the thrust of the passage is in just the opposite direction, imagining a form of cognition and composition in which the unremembered takes pride of place. The moment at which the "magasin de la memoire" should be most crucial is a decisive break with the past.

By now, I have said enough about Montaigne's ethics of nonchalance to risk a provisional description, one which identifies a set of written gestures that remain central for all my primary texts. My brief reading of "Des Menteurs" illustrates what I mean by "nonchalance" with enough detail that what follows should be comprehensible, even if some of its consequences, and some of its historical coordinates, remain forthcoming:

(1) An ethics of nonchalance grants ethical value to the course of least resistance, but its estimation of emotional ease is idiosyncratic. It undermines conventional bonds between certain kinds of activity and corresponding emotional states, so that "difficult" activities (for example, steadfast honesty in the face of the temptation of personal advancement through dissimulation) are recast as accidents of careless living. As my reading of Montaigne in Chapter 1 demonstrates, the "course of least resistance" is a capacious category, capable of accommodating even those activities most associated with emotional exertion. Nonchalance is not inert complacency, but perhaps it *does* confound the modern *charge* of complacency, which assumes a close connection between feelings of equanimity and an abstention from ethical action. Indeed, nonchalance puts all such necessary relations into question.

(2) An ethics of nonchalance is a departure from Stoicism. Montaigne owes a great deal to Seneca, but because both Seneca's thought and the neo-Stoicism of Lipsius encourage the establishment of indifference through the muscular suppression of the

passions, they cannot provide the basis for an ethics of weakness.⁵ Most theories of the passions, both early and late modern, accept the Stoic notion that certain passions emerge predictably from particular experiences, locating ethical value in *managing* those passions, the origins of which are not subject to question. The literature of nonchalance refrains from universalizing pronouncements about the emergence of the passions, thus leaving open the question of how different human beings respond, emotionally, to different situations. Moreover, because indifference often appears as a default position in the literature of nonchalance, rather than as a hard-won achievement of discipline, it does not preclude the irruption of passion into an experience of serenity. Nonchalance often functions as the shadow of emotion, not in the sense of a constitutive exclusion, but, to use the language of visual art, in the sense of a negative space—the background or atmosphere in which the passions may (or may not) appear.⁶ A final consequence of non-

⁵ For Montaigne's indebtedness to Stoicism, see Lyons. For Montaigne's departure from Stoicism, see Quint. Quint would seem to be an ally for my project, since the "ethos of yielding" he attributes to Montaigne resembles my own emphasis on passivity, but Quint does not take Montaigne seriously as a theorist of emotion. Up to a point, I am sympathetic with Quint's account of Montaignian "pliancy," which he explains as follows: "Against the hard-liner who never yields, even in the face of death—the constant Stoic, the honor-bound aristocrat, the religious zealot—[Montaigne] offers a pliant goodness that is the product not of heroic effort and philosophical discipline, not even of Christian charity or meekness, but rather of ordinary fellow-feeling" (ix). But the "goodness" Montaigne continually frames as "ordinary" is anything but. The deep idiosyncrasy of Montaigne's ethics of nonchalance has to be named "ordinary" and "natural" in order to retain its casual quality, but Montaigne does not expect others to share it with him. Indeed, Quint's ultimate judgment of Montaigne's politics are distant from my own: "It is one of the weaknesses," he writes, "of Montaigne's ethics and of the political submission they underwrite that he appears to suggest that there is little if anything one can do to oppose the actions of a ruler" (144). As Chapter I of the dissertation explains, however, emotional pliancy need not translate into blanket obedience to political authority.

⁶ This is Daniel M. Gross's understanding of apathy in *The Secret History of Emotion: From Aristotle's Rhetoric to Modern Brain Science*. Gross argues persuasively that emotions are irreducibly social, constituted between rather than within subjects, predicated on social inequalities, and thus differentially distributed. Gross finds a good example of the social formation of emotion in Aristotle: "A slave...does not provoke in a master passions such as friendly feeling, confidence, or even pity, because, according to Aristotle, pity is directed toward those of equal status who have suffered a wrong unjustly" (42). For Gross, this differential distribution implies not only that certain subjects only feel a particular range of emotions for certain other subjects (masters feel pity for other masters, not for slaves), but also that only certain subjects are granted emotional range. For example, the "emotions of social responsibility, such as magnanimity or angry indignation" are not afforded to the bottom rungs of the social hierarchy" (4). By focusing on the rhetorical fashioning of emotional experiences, my project shares Gross's resistance to reductive biological understandings of human emotion, but I am more focused on the ductility of emotion than he is. In Chapter 2,

Stoic indifference is the revision of gender identity. Because Stoic self-control tends to be coded masculine, and emotional volatility tends to be coded feminine, the development of casual indifference within a masculine persona tends to draw him away from his putative gender and into a space of indistinction.

(3) An ethics of nonchalance tends to focus attention on the present moment—but this narrowing of perspective is not a bid for mastery. Absorption in the present is not, as some forms of skepticism suggest, an experience of sensory or cognitive plenitude. On the contrary, it is an experience of temporal contraction that rests modestly in the realm of the apparent. Nonchalance is an abstention from desires that point from the past to the future, because those desires would constitute the present as a chapter in a story of libidinal pursuit. Instead, nonchalance draws the present moment into an experience of discontinuity. Even when, for example, Montaigne should be rummaging through his memory for a commonplace that suits his rhetorical purpose, he speaks of imaginative conjuration and denies his capacity to remember: thinking and writing are experiences of the contingency of the present. Elsewhere in the *Essais*, Montaigne makes this phenomenon explicit: “A chaque minute,” he writes, “il me semble que je m’eschape” (133). This remarkable sentence eats its own tail, beginning with an impersonal construction and then naming the subject (“je”) who turns out, immediately afterward, to be the object (“me”) of the verb. The resulting construction (“I escape myself”) ensures that the grammatical subject does not *perform* the action, since this verb undermines the subject’s implicit attempt to *capture* himself in understanding. This most proximate—most “present”—of objects, the self, is never quite present after all.⁷ An experience of

“Apathy in the Shadow Economy of Emotion,” Gross describes apathy as “the rhetorically constituted shadow economy against which a positive economy of emotion is fashioned” (55). For Seneca, Gross argues, “getting one’s toes stepped on or overtures ignored does not necessarily provoke anger (or its inverse, studied detachment). However, getting one’s toes stepped on or overtures ignored *undeservedly* does. Since, socially speaking, the slave deserves little compared to the monarch, his capacity for anger also differs dramatically” (69). The experiences of muted emotion that interest me are not experiences of emotional incapacity, but instead suggest default disengagement that does not predictably dissipate in the face of ethical urgency.

⁷ Timothy Hampton’s rejection of the standard scholarly account of Montaignian “interiority” has proved instructive to me in this regard. Hampton opts for the term “individuality,” which for Montaigne refers to a “jaunty,” “improvisatory” responsiveness to the “contingencies of the moment” (45). “In the place of a traditional ideal of constancy,” Hampton writes, “we get the figure of the improvising actor, free from allegiance and memory, shaping the moment as he finds it” (47). Of all the scholarship on Montaigne, Hampton’s description of Montaigne’s “jaunty” absorption in the present moment comes closest to describing the topic of my analysis. For me, of course, the emotional corollaries of this absorption are taken much more seriously. For Hampton, Montaigne’s “placid surface” must “conceal turbulence,” just as any political engagement, even when described as the most careless of allegiances, must in fact be understood as “a difficult process” (32). I am interested in the ethical possibilities of placid waters in which surface and depth are equally tranquil—or in which emotion is not understood in terms of depth. The title of my project sounds like an inversion of

nonchalance floats free from whatever would bind the present to the past, and careless subjectivity experiences itself gently slipping away.

(4) An ethics of nonchalance often comes naturally, but its effect is to denaturalize emotion. In “Des Menteurs,” physiological defect and temperament generate behavior that has to be defended against misinterpretation. What comes most naturally to Montaigne is totally illegible to his friends. This gesture is typical: Montaigne claims that his behavior is natural, but also that it belongs to the radically singular nature of a particular person—indeed, as I have suggested, of a particular moment.⁸ “Nature,” for this reason, cannot be understood in its ordinary senses, either early or late modern. It is not normative, universal, predictable, or prescriptive. Indeed, Montaigne has a penchant for aphoristic reminders of the utter specificity of those characteristics he suggests are innate. In “Du jeune Caton,” Montaigne writes, “Je n’ay point cette erreur commune de juger d’un autre selon que je suis. J’en croy aysément des choses diverses à moi....et, au rebours du commun, reçoÿ plus facilement la difference que la ressemblance en nous” (281). He offers a snappier version of this point in “Des Boyteux”: “Je n’ay veu monstre et miracle au monde plus expres que moy-mesme” (III, 240-1). If the deep idiosyncrasy of Montaigne’s experience derives from nature, then the latter starts to look like a flexible domain of singular experiences. Its position of importance in the *Essais* derives from its capacity to suggest feelings and activities that simply unfold without prompting, or that, contrary to expectation, fail to do so. “Nature” has to be understood as part of the vocabulary of passivity. “Natural” means “effortless.”⁹

Hampton’s “Difficult Engagements,” but my title’s echo is accidental. Indeed, Montaigne’s “engagements” are quite difficult from a structural or linguistic perspective: describing how they are established requires sophistication and patience. “Careless” describes only their emotional corollary. For more on the status of “difficulty” as an emotional experience, see my discussion of Terada in section III of this preface.

⁸ Barthes writes, “Perhaps the Neutral is that: to accept the predicate as nothing more than a moment: a time” (61).

⁹ My discussion of forms of activity that, because they seem casual or matter-of-fact, fail to sit easily in the category of action bears some similarity to Anne-Lise Francois’s fascinating account of the “open secret.” My project is closest to hers in its consideration of the ethical concomitants of the perception of the naturalness of a given state of affairs—the sense that it should be taken for granted. We also share a certain distance from critical methods that assume a hermeneutics of suspicion, especially those that promote an endless labor of interpretive vigilance. My focus on the connection between emotion and action, however, steers my project in a different direction: the activities that interest me do so because of their atmosphere of insouciance, even when they would otherwise seem examples of brawny, energetic, observable action. More generally, my project does not share her investment in problems of secrecy and revelation, obscurity and legibility—even if the unremarkable quality of the revelations that interest her and the nonchalance with which those revelations are given and received are themselves germane to my line of inquiry. Finally, as soon as Chapter 1, my focus is often the capacity of casual indifference to heighten receptivity—not an interest of Francois’s.

II. Against Emotional Management: The Passions at the Threshold of Physiology

Early Modern Studies does not welcome a theory like mine—like, that is, Montaigne's. The discipline's most common metaphors for subjectivity disallow effortless indifference. By describing subjectivity as expressive, they picture emotional experience in spatial terms. Feelings materialize within the body, and the only question worth asking concerns the fate of those internal impulses: Do they rise to the surface or recede into the dark recesses of the heart or mind? The basic experience of the subject is thus the suppression and release of the passions. Ethical investments always generate passion, and experiences of indifference always entail the application of force. Throughout the field, scholars who seem at odds with one another share this model of emotional experience. Some position themselves as critics of a perceived failure on the part of poststructuralism to grapple with the "body," conceived as an exterior to language.¹⁰ Others seek to undermine the universality of emotions by arguing that they are historically variable or subject to the manipulations of culture. Perhaps unwittingly, however, scholars who argue for maximum variability adopt a structural model of emotion from the universalists: emotion remains a force the subject must choose to push strenuously inward or release indulgently outward. Vigorous debate about the management of emotion, its suppression and release, reaffirms the impossibility of theorizing casual indifference. Differences in opinion about emotional management reveal how powerful an impression the underlying metaphor has made: emotion is nothing unless it bubbles relentlessly toward the surfaces of bodies.

Michael Schoenfeldt's polite but forceful disagreement with Gail Kern Paster illustrates the implicit collaboration of intellectual adversaries in this field. In *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England*, Schoenfeldt objects to Paster's interpretation of theater in *The Body Embarrassed* because it places too heavy an emphasis on exposed, porous, and "leaky" bodies. Taking cues both from Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of the Rabelaisian body and from Norbert Elias's account of the advancing threshold of shame that accompanies the "civilizing process," Paster explores the construction of embarrassment on the early modern stage, focusing her attention on inward and outward flows of corporeal matter. Schoenfeldt proposes that scholars leave Paster's messy carnival behind and study bodies that regulate themselves more insistently, especially those that calibrate digestion in order to maintain their "constitutional solubility" (15). In this way, he displaces an exceedingly porous version of selfhood with a highly fortified alternative—an "internal kingdom"—and the importance of the body for Early Modern Studies comes to reside not in its anarchic self-overflowing but rather in its capacity for self-discipline (39). But this displacement is actually a repetition: Schoenfeldt's critique obscures the fact that he is very much at peace with Paster. He does not so much challenge her observations as propose a disciplinary change in subject. Like many scholars of early modernity, Schoenfeldt believes he can locate the "produc[tion]" of "individual subjectivity" in his objects of study, and thus his interest lies only in corporeal selves that affirm their bounded individuality, over and against the external world (12). Schoenfeldt wants to talk about specific bodies that Paster excludes, but both sets of bodies have the

¹⁰ Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter* remains the best response to that charge.

same characteristics and the same capacities to feel. Their central function is to mediate passages between inside and outside.

Julie Ellison's work on the prehistory of liberal guilt helps explain the subterranean alliance of Schoenfeldt's fortress and Paster's excretory tube—one that supplements my own observation that both figures confirm an expressive model of emotion. For Ellison, the aesthetics of control and release mutually legitimate each other. Beginning with the Exclusion Crisis of 1679-81, the moment at which "sensibility became Whiggish," Ellison shows that "emotional volatility" and "emotional discipline" are "strategically choreographed" throughout the Age of Sensibility, and perhaps, as her introductory and concluding chapters suggest, into the "liberal" present. Her study focuses on literary texts that juxtapose "men in tears" with "stoical," usually Roman, "foils" (24). Speaking of literary plots themselves, Ellison writes, "Sensibility is the price paid by the republican family for its own appetite for impersonality," referring to the capacity of cries of pain to legitimate actions they seem to protest (36). The rigorous imposition of a political program generates a surplus of negative affect that at best "apolog[izes]" for that program without contesting it. Sentimental sons weep for their fathers' unfeeling discipline, producing emotion instead of opposition, tears instead of arms. This might seem a peculiar point of comparison for my own discussion, since the only possibilities Ellison considers are expressive ones, and since, with a small space of overlap, the historical stakes of Ellison's argument are different from my own. But Ellison's observations transcend her historical frame: her portrait of the complicit relationship between father and son is an image of Schoenfeldt's dispute with Paster. For both Stoic father and anguished son, ethics always *chronologically follows* and *ontologically precedes* emotional experience. Both father and son feel emotion welling up inside; the former suppresses it in the name of politics while the latter gives it full expression in the name of interpersonal relations. What emphatically matters in this encounter is the father's ethical action: emotion is merely the atmosphere in which one acts or expresses impotence. Such an understanding of emotion forecloses the possibility of an ethics of casual indifference. The latter requires a state of unfeeling in which ethical activity and emotional passivity blur together, a possibility disallowed by the *sequencing* of emotion and ethics. Moreover, nonchalance requires no exertion, while the choices presented by father and son are of exactly the opposite kind: the *achievement* of indifference and the *capitulation* to feeling are both responses to the burden of emotional labor.

This dynamic explains the traditional intellectual history of early modern Europe, as well as the recent wave of scholarship represented here by Schoenfeldt and Paster. William Bouwsma's "two faces of Humanism," for example, are none other than the protagonists of Ellison's history: stern father (Seneca) and weepy son (Augustine). Stoicism, in this reading, teaches that humanity and divinity are interconnected because of the sovereignty of reason over the body. Human beings are granted access to God through the "divine spark" of reason lodged within them. Virtue, in this system, consists of the total discipline of the passions—*apatheia*—in order to preserve the supremacy of reason. Augustinian Humanism, on the other hand, locates the interconnection of humanity and divinity only in Scripture, a relationship mediated by the heart rather than the brain. Augustine conceives of every human being as a child of God in the most general sense, granting no special power to reason, and presents the universe as

unintelligible, yielding nothing to rational inquiry. Augustinian “corporate democracy,” as opposed to brainy stoicism, makes the passions of the body (release) rather than the austerity of thought (suppression) the passageway to God (26).¹¹ In this respect, Schoenfeldt’s account is almost identical to Bouwsma’s. Foregrounding the intellectual context in which Galenic medicine, Neo-Stoicism, and Protestant theology combine, he describes a conflict in early modern culture between the “autonomy and self-sufficiency of the Stoic” and the “Christian’s absolute dependence on divine grace for the true happiness of salvation” (17). He reads works of literature along this axis, suggesting, for example, that “Herbert attempts to synthesize the aggressive moderation of Stoic ethics with the emotional extremity of Christian devotion” (34). As Ellison has shown, these conflicts can be—and in this case, unmistakably are—collaborations, so that Schoenfeldt’s dialectic between Stoic and Protestant should be understood not only as a shadow theater in which his own reading of early modernity faces off with Paster’s, but also as yet another attempt to confirm the expressive subject for whom an impassioned ethics is always an ethics of emotional management.

One symptom of the omnipresence of a single understanding of emotion in early modern studies is the increasing reliance of the discipline on medical discourse. Both Schoenfeldt and Paster assimilate literary writing about the passions to the technical languages of physiology and natural philosophy. Galenic medicine serves as a template for hermeneutics: emotional experience and “individual subjectivity” are always understood as manifestations of the balance (or imbalance) of humors. In a later essay, Paster describes her work in *The Body Embarrassed* and elsewhere as the “enforce[ment] of ‘interpretive literalism’ on locutions of bodily self-experience,” a formulation that betrays the way this kind of historicism, which instrumentalizes a technical language in order to interpret works of literature, ends up policing the experience of reading (116). As a kind of interpretive “enforce[ment],” it hypostatizes emotion as strictly material corporeality—and, unsurprisingly, as the suppression/release system I have described. Quoting herself, Paster writes, “What is ‘bodily or emotional figuration’ for us, preserved metaphors of somatic consciousness, was the literal stuff of physiological theory for early modern scriptors of the body” (116). Surely “scriptor” is not an adequate category of analysis: Paster moves blithely between Shakespeare and Thomas Wright, between drama and physiology, as if these discourses always obeyed the same laws. Indeed, it would be restrictively literal-minded even to read Wright in these terms, since his physiology is also very much a rhetoric, shaped by the Jesuit’s proselytizing mission in England. Schoenfeldt is less concerned with persuading his reader that literature should be rendered legible through medicine, since he believes the value of the latter goes without saying. “Anger still feels hot to us, and requires that we ‘cool down,’” he explains, suggesting that “we,” universally speaking, *really do experience humoral states of feeling* (6). No matter how divergent their interpretive practices, these scholars together consolidate the identification of the passions and the humors. In so doing, they

¹¹ One example of the problem with this scheme is that Bouwsma places Montaigne among the Stoics, even though he places emphasis on what is most Montaignian in Augustinianism. A line he quotes from Augustine, for example, sounds a lot like Montaigne, if I can put it anachronistically: “I am the sort of man who writes because he has made progress, and who makes progress—by writing” (23).

materialize a valve-like subject whose experience is always a matter of control, and for whom an ethical carelessness would never enter the realm of possibility.

I do not wish to overstate my reservations. At their best, these scholars generate insights about early modern subjectivity that enable new readings of canonical and lesser-known texts. Schoenfeldt is especially persuasive about the double-sidedness of self-discipline, its capacity to function both as “an extension of governmental control” and, less predictably, as the disobedient subject’s fortification against the monarch (39). Paster’s corporeal materialism reveals a startling, almost monist vision of the interconnection of interior and exterior space, so that “the early modern subject’s passionate experience of self turns out to be a feelingly intimate transaction with the world” (129). The success of these arguments illustrates the simultaneously narrow and far-reaching stakes of my argument. Schoenfeldt and Paster read the right sources (Hippocrates, Galen, and other repositories of Galenic medicine, Stoics and neo-Stoics, Protestant theologians) for the right reasons (to historicize emotion), which means my objections refer specifically to interpretive strategy. Indeed, my own exploration of an ethics of indifference takes the confluence of these traditions seriously, but resists the temptation to reduce one discourse to another. I contend that non-expressive tropes for emotional experience are present in my primary sources. The historicism that currently holds sway in this field has an uncanny habit of discovering exactly those early modern discourses that repeat modern assumptions about emotional experience.

Were I less suspicious of the medicalization of the history of emotion, research in early modern physiology would have presented me with a different topic, one the field would no doubt welcome. In spite of considerable scholarly interest in the theory of the humors, especially melancholy, one of the four temperaments has received little attention.¹² For most scholars of early modernity, the phlegmatic remains a mystery. This is no accident, for in this case early modern medicine yields a picture of emotional experience that is nearly incompatible with an expressive metaphor. Unsurprisingly, it also shares a great deal with casual indifference, as I have described it. Here is Mary Floyd-Wilson’s account of the phlegmatic, the temperament of “northerners,”¹³ including the English:

Their greatest distinction...is a complete lack of distinction. Unlike melancholics for example, who are haunted by fearful imaginings, the phlegmatic simply lack the urge to fight. Idle, dull, and lethargic (neither angry nor pleased, as [Thomas] Wright observes), those afflicted with cold, moist complexions are also understood to be incapable of sustaining an emotion or even an appetite. And in contrast to the cool and ‘imperturbable self-containment’ produced by neo-Stoic discipline...the phlegmatic northerner’s passionless state is an effect of exceeding porousness. The passionless are not only those “[u]nmoved,” possessing exteriors as hard as stone, but also those with no exterior at all, in a perpetual state of cold flux. (136)

¹² See, for example, Schiesari; Douglas; and Wells.

¹³ Hippocrates’ “Scythian” type.

The phlegmatic is a nobody, a subject whose borders are so porous that she is better understood as a feature of the environment than as a discrete individual. Passions pass through her but she cannot “sustain” them, and thus her “passionless state” is a consequence of weakness rather than discipline. It is no wonder, then, that scholars have mostly ignored her, for these features—tending toward nonchalance—are difficult to square with the dynamics of suppression and release. Perhaps it *is* surprising, however, that scholars have managed to overlook her in subfields where her presence should be glaring: the extensive discussion of Montaigne’s supposed melancholy, for example.¹⁴ For me, though, the crucial point is that the ethics of nonchalance is *not*, as it were, the ethics of phlegm. No matter how porous, the phlegmatic body must still be conceived as a container into and out of which substances flow: a habitually open valve is no less a valve. To assimilate the nonchalant to the phlegmatic would not only, in spite of the latter’s porosity, confirm the structurally expressive status of subjectivity; it would also exchange singularity for universality, strategic naturalization for normative naturalization, literary plasticity for biological determinism. My objections to medicalized emotion do not clear a space for a study of emotion that ignores medicine; instead, I suggest only that literary and medical discourses can be read alongside, but perhaps not through, one another.¹⁵

III. Indifference to Anxiety: A Future for the Theory of Emotion

I have said that Early Modern Studies relies almost exclusively on the metaphor of expression; the theory of emotion, on the other hand, remains focused on the polemic around that metaphor. The discussion of emotion in literary studies and critical theory is

¹⁴ I am thinking in particular of Michael Screech’s influential account, *Montaigne and Melancholy: The Wisdom of the Essays*.

¹⁵ A more responsible approach to early modern emotion would take technical discourses seriously without abandoning itself to their most explicit claims—especially since the identification of those claims tends to exclude those that disturb modern commonplaces about emotional experience. One field of research has set a precedent for this kind of responsibility, but it bears less directly on my topic than physiological criticism. Research on the politics of the passions—the manipulation of the passions for strategic purposes—has revealed the plasticity of emotion in early modernity, and has taken the contribution of the literary arts to political theory seriously instead of privileging the reverse relationship. Like the scholarship on the physiology of the passions, however, this field values generalization. The former treats the four humors as determinants of human complexion, while the latter treats human motives and behaviors as essentially calculable. The ethics of nonchalance, on the other hand, unsettles generalizations about emotional reactions and their consequences. For this reason, it might be a corrective to—and, as an ethical deployment of the putatively physiological, a bridge between—medical and political readings of early modern emotion. One of the best examples of the scholarship that explores the debt of political discourse to literary writing is the work of Victoria Kahn. See especially her critique of Albert Hirschman, “The Passions and the Interests in Early Modern Europe: The Case of Guarini’s *Il Pastor fido*,” as well as *Wayward Contracts: The Crisis of Political Obligation in England, 1640-1674*.

often camouflage for an assault on deconstruction, and defenses of the latter have begun to appear on the same terrain. Like recent scholarly attention to the body, research on emotion often seeks to push back against a perceived linguistification of experience. In response, scholars like Rei Terada have begun to theorize emotion through, rather than against, deconstruction. For my part, I am disappointed that most theories of emotion, on both sides, turn out to be offensives in a conflict that has had more than its share of eloquent participants. It seems possible to discuss emotion without shoring up self-identity or exposing self-difference—or without, at minimum, either of these goals taking center stage. That said, I should clarify that the anti-deconstructive position is especially disabling. It always describes emotion as an expression of interiority in order then to use it as evidence of self-identity: we emote what we feel inside and thus we represent ourselves as we really are.¹⁶ Terada's deconstructive theory, on the other hand, grants emotion a plasticity that enables the reimagining of emotional experience. In the next few pages, I consider the benefits of moving the interdisciplinary conversation about emotion off this polemical terrain, first by showing how anti-deconstructive theories of emotion are actually theories of subjectivity, and then by explaining how even those deconstructive theories that open a space for a project like my own nonetheless remain constrained by the ground of the discussion. By remaining focused on the question of subjectivity, even the most adventurous theories fail to give rigorous thought to those qualities of emotional experience that are not evidentiary in this narrow respect. My example of this failure is the current prestige of anxiety in those quarters of the humanities most influenced by poststructuralism and New Historicism. The most successful treatments of emotion—those that think creatively about alternatives to the expressive metaphor—remain complacent about the value of anxiety as a signal of ethical engagement, and sometimes even as a reliable impetus to it. In a way, both my observations about the theory of emotion—that it remains a version of an old conflict about subjectivity, and that it assumes a straightforward connection between anxiety and ethics—are versions of a single observation. Many theorists of emotion have assumed a posture of anxious self-reflexivity, which encourages the ceaseless replay of old conflicts, just as it tightens the sinews of consternation in order to offer proof of its own ethical seriousness.

On the less anxious side of the critical terrain stands Philip Fisher, whose influential meditation on emotion, *The Vehement Passions*, is actually an assault on all modern philosophies that emphasize divisions within subjectivity, from Freudian psychoanalysis to deconstruction. He never quite articulates this aim, but he offers a description of impassioned states that seeks to resuscitate the notion of an undivided self who would not be subject to any experience of internal differentiation. He arrives at this account circuitously, placing his own procedure into question before shying away from doubt. Interestingly, he suggests that all canonical philosophies of emotion choose a particular emotional experience as a “template” for every other one, so that, for example, the Stoic fixation on fear generates a broader vision of passionate experience as

¹⁶ I agree with Terada's remarks on this matter: “The purpose of expression tropes is to extrapolate a human subject circularly from the phenomenon of emotion. The claim that emotion requires a subject—thus we can see that we're subjects, since we have emotions—creates the illusion of subjectivity rather than showing evidence of it” (11).

essentially fearful (7). For the Stoics, he explains, “the passions are taken to be, like illness, an interruption of the self, a disturbance...” (61). The insight that canonical philosophies of emotion are habitually reductive seems to promise critique, but Fisher repeats the Stoic gesture: he simply installs a different emotion, anger, as a template for the other passions. Fisher glosses anger, and thus all the “vehement passions,” as “militancy about a perimeter of the self” (248). A theory of emotion turns out to be yet another defense of coherent subjectivity in the face of deconstructive danger. Fisher’s disparaging asides about contemporary theoretical reflection on emotion betray this motive: “It is good to keep in mind,” Fisher writes, “that one alternative to choosing instances from Homer, Shakespeare, Aristotle, and Hume [Fisher’s method]...is to follow the whim of contemporary philosophy in using quirky, odd, low-level examples, a procedure I call ‘science fiction of the inner life’” (27). The consignment of experiences of self-difference not only to the realm of the “quirky” but also to the fantastical realm of “science fiction” reveals Fisher’s aggressively imperial project: it is not enough to identify a group of passionate experiences which zealously guard the “perimeter of the self”; all other experiences must be marginalized or rendered unreal. Fisher’s strained dismissal of late modernity as “provincial,” in spite of his own continual recourse to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* as the quintessential example of divided selfhood, indicates the lengths to which this book will go to discredit any alternative to “self-identical being” (26, 42). Fisher’s most vehement passions, it seems, are not about the passions after all.

Nonetheless, Fisher avoids legitimate dispute; he fails to engage the philosophers he implicitly challenges. Aside from the occasional reference to Freud and to “contemporary philosophy” in general, he leaves his modern adversaries unnamed. Particularly telling, in this respect, is Fisher’s continual recourse to the Stoics as voices of disagreement. Stoicism cannot be a real adversary; it does not posit self-difference so much as the incursion of the foreign into the realm of the self-identical. Fisher’s pseudo-refutation of the Stoics seeks to buttress subjectivity not only by insisting on absolute self-identity, but also by placing an ally—one who assumes self-identity—in the place of an adversary. This tactic precludes serious thought about the structure of emotional experience. Fisher’s discussion of “spiritedness” is a good example of this problem. He attributes “spiritedness” to all emotional experiences that resemble anger in their undividedness. He introduces the term as an alternative to Stoic apathy, which he describes as follows: “The word ‘apathy,’” he writes, “the single most important concept of Stoic ethics, still bundles together, two thousand years later, the same four matters: lack of passion, or even freedom from the passions; lack of energy and excitement; lack of interest in things; lack of activity or action” (228). Though its longevity seems to surprise him, Fisher does not seek to separate this “bundle” of qualities; instead, he simply complains that we have lost a term for the opposite of apathy and offers “spiritedness” as a solution. This mechanical inversion predictably produces a bundle of qualities that differs from the original only in value: passion, excitement, intensity of interest, activity. Fisher’s evaluation is different—he privileges passion over indifference—but he “bundles” concepts together like a good Stoic. The most canonical equation between emotion, energy, investment in the exterior world, and liveliness remains solidly in place. Such conceptual grouping could never accommodate casual indifference. To take up one example, Montaigne decouples two of the qualities that Fisher and the Stoics suture together. In the *Essais*, one cannot assume a connection

between “apathy” and “lack of activity or action”; indeed, as I suggest above, the most casual emotional experiences often correlate with ethical engagement.

Rei Terada is one of the few scholars who have come at this problem from the opposite direction, defending deconstruction as a theory of emotion. In *Feeling in Theory*, Terada argues against Fredric Jameson, Luc Ferry, Alain Renaut and others—including, proleptically, Philip Fisher, whose book appeared soon after hers—who identify deconstruction with the “waning of affect” (1).¹⁷ For Terada, classical subjectivity should bear this description: it is only the absolute self-identity of the classical subject that disallows emotional experience. On this account, the subject only feels emotion insofar as she remains divided from herself. Thus the classical philosophical tradition successfully theorizes emotion in one way: the struggles and strains with which the philosopher unsuccessfully establishes the absolute self-identity of the subject are emotional indexes of her failure to cohere. For Terada, then, emotion emerges *as* and *through* the continual “death of the subject.” Terada should be credited with venturing a theory of emotion that avoids the assumptions of Fisher’s account. By understanding emotion as an experience of self-difference and self-distance, she suggests that there is always an interpretive dimension to feeling. If one experiences oneself at a distance, then experience of emotion is always mediated. Thus “pathos” is the key term in Terada’s theory of emotion. Pathos, usually a term for the experience of another person’s emotion through identification, becomes constitutive of emotion in general, including one’s experience of oneself. Terada’s theory of pathos is congenial to my project because it disallows assumptions about the necessary relations between empirical experiences and emotional reactions, as well as between emotional experiences and modes of activity. As occasions for interpretation, the relationships between perception, emotion, and activity can never be safely presupposed. In this way, Terada’s book undermines the habitual sequence of equations Fisher inherits from the Stoics—equations that tend to operate implicitly throughout this field of inquiry.

Terada’s scope, however, is her weakness. Because her focus is the emergence of emotion from Derridean and de Manian deconstruction, her observations are mostly structural, but this field is not as carefully delimited as it could be. My basic point, of course, is that scholarship on emotion should *refuse* to delimit itself in accordance with the polemic around subjectivity. At the other end of the spectrum, however, problems arise from structural arguments that import commonplace notions about the more banal dimensions of emotional experience. Despite the adventurousness of her theory, for instance, Terada’s conception of negative affect resembles the picture of anxiety that looms large throughout the deconstructive quarters of the field. Before explaining this resemblance, I refer to the pair of epigraphs at the beginning of my introduction as indications of the attractiveness of anxiety to scholars with political investments. “Mon dessein,” Montaigne writes in “Des Livres,” “est de passer doucement, et non laborieusement, ce qui reste de vie...” (79). As if in anticipation of such a desire, Milton pictures Comus, the villain of his *Masque*, “Offring to every weary Travailer, / His orient liquor in a Crystal Glasse...” (126). Placing Milton in dialogue with Montaigne, I suggest that Montaigne’s gentle repose bears a strong resemblance to Comus’s moral trap: the offer of luxurious rest and an intoxicating draught seduces the unwary traveler (she who

¹⁷ The expression comes from Jameson (10).

“travails”) into forgetting her moral vigilance and becoming a prisoner of sin. Scholars are often rightfully wary of similar seductions: carelessness sounds a lot like irresponsibility—to say nothing of quietist complacency. The ethics of nonchalance, however, suggests an experience of ease that is distinctly emotional, which means it can accommodate—and even sustain—all sorts of intellectual and corporeal exertion. The point is that emotional quiet does not have to be quietist, and that carefree experiences do not have to be free of responsibility. More than simply seeking to broaden the category of ethics to encompass activities that tend to be excluded, I also suggest that a fear of complacency can generate a fallacious equivalence between anxiety and ethics—which is itself a kind of quietism, replacing ethics with affect. Just as carelessness can be unethical, so too can anxiety, self-doubt, and righteous indignation. Indeed, the subject who finds that she cannot redress injustice may very well grant herself a consolatory nobility by wallowing in affective discomfort.

Terada does not indulge in that self-deception; indeed, she is as close as the scholarship gets to a departure from the equation between anxiety and ethics. On the other hand, the centrality of “intellectual difficulty” to her account of subjectivity gives anxiety a central role in experience *tout court*. Indeed, she obliquely installs “difficulty” as yet another “template” for emotional experience: everything we feel becomes an interpretive transformation of a more basic experience of anxious striving. All feelings derive from a kind of primordial anxiety about the capacity of the self to cohere. Commenting on de Man’s critique of the Kantian sublime, Terada writes, “It is an understatement to assert that emotion compensates for cognitive difficulty, for, logically, the first emotion *is* cognitive difficulty” (31). Terada makes a similar generalization when she glosses pathos: “Pathos is the Planck length of emotion, bounding the theory of emotion as the least that can be said” (14). These observations are the same: the mediation denoted by pathos *is* the “difficulty” of thinking. She further explains her line of reasoning in the following commentary on Derrida’s *Memoires for Paul de Man*:

Language becomes difficult when emotion overtakes its speaker—as we know. But difficulty also links the vocabulary of emotion to that of thought. Intellectual problems are ‘difficult,’ and some answers to complex questions are ‘hard to say,’ as though an economic principle of information density inhibited speech. As with strong emotion, it belongs to thought in some sense to be difficult. It seems that intellectual difficulty is a nonaffective expression for affect—a philosophical name for the feeling of thought. (131)

The inherent discontinuity of thought becomes the basic unit of emotional experience. So far, this formulation is compelling: it describes the structure of emotional experience, but it does not say anything about what those experiences are—or about what they are *like*. In this way, it sets those experiences free from the expressive metaphor. Terada does not always retain a structural vocabulary, however: “Intellectual difficulty” might be an “expression for affect,” but it cannot be a “nonaffective” one, since it conjures up the image of a subject who is at great pains to cohere. I withdraw from this dimension of Terada’s account. Self-difference need not entail anxiety. Indeed, it is easy enough to imagine an experience of self-difference as cool syncopation—a tranquil experience of

rhythm in which the subject continually experiences herself as different from herself. My own topic, which I have described as “casual indifference,” might also be formulated as “casual self-difference.”

The drift of the discipline toward anxiety is easily observed in a book like *Ugly Feelings*, Sianne Ngai’s popular, versatile study of “minor” emotions in modern American culture. Ngai rightly points out that anxiety often registers impotence rather than engagement—the suspension, rather than the performance, of action. For my purposes, however, she sells herself short by assuming the habitual connections between passion and action: anxiety fails to deliver activity only because it lacks in power. To the responsibly anxious scholar, Ngai’s work suggests the necessity of fueling anxiety so that it bursts forth as an angry conflagration. But what if, as I have suggested, all the commonplaces about the relationship between passion and action need to be rethought? Ngai’s argument begins with a contrast between weak feelings and the grandiose passions of traditional aesthetics, suggesting that the former enable a diagnosis of the forms of social powerlessness that attend the expansion and consolidation of transnational capitalism. She is especially interested in the possibility that works of art, themselves rendered unthreatening by their separation from what Adorno calls “empirical society,” would for that very reason have a special capacity to subject other kinds of powerlessness to critique. Her argument, which draws heavily from the aims and methods of the Frankfurt School, nonetheless confirms the assumptions of Fisher’s account, which would seem to be its antithesis. Like Fisher, Ngai argues that political action follows from “vehement passions,” while passivity correlates with the emotions she calls “minor” or “ugly.” Although she reflects on Paolo Virno’s contention that the relationship between emotion and the sociopolitical may have changed in late modernity, thereby increasing the importance of “minor” emotions, she does not seem to take seriously the notion that the *link* between feeling and action *is* and *has been*, since at least the dawn of modernity, an open question. She focuses on minor emotions in order to theorize inaction—“suspended” or “obstructed” agency—thereby foreclosing the possibility that as vague a feeling as “irritation” might indeed be mobilized in a particular political project, or that as powerful a feeling as anger might accompany exactly the experiences of inaction that interest her. Ngai’s claim that “there can be nothing ambiguous about one’s rage or terror” seems unambiguously wrong to me, as does the inverse proposition, also presupposed by her project, that there is something especially ambiguous, generally speaking, about irritation or envy. Reifying emotion in this way permits the repetition of the scholarly truism that anxiety derives from ethical engagement: investigating “ugly feelings” means looking social powerlessness in the face rather than deluding oneself with compensatory fantasies. Ngai claims to study exactly those “ugly feelings” which are “explicitly *amoral* and *noncathartic*, offering no satisfactions of virtue, however oblique, nor any therapeutic or purifying release” (6). But “ugly feelings,” I suggest, are compensatory by virtue of not being compensatory. By promising not to offer any experience of satisfaction, they generate the satisfaction of being without illusions.

This is not to say that scholars of emotion should withdraw their attention from negative affect, but only that they might open new lines of inquiry if they were less confident about the relationship between emotion and activity. Scholarship like Kevis Goodman’s—which neither enlists affect in the polemic around subjectivity nor suggests an easy link between ethics and anxiety—demonstrates the fruitfulness of further inquiry

into the history of negative emotion. Drawing on Raymond Williams's conception of historical experience "in solution"—history in the present tense, prior to its consolidation ("precipitation") by the historian into knowable categories and objects of analysis—Goodman's study of Georgic poetry from the late seventeenth century through Romanticism suggests that emotional disturbances in that tradition indicate a certain apprehension of the chaotic and not-yet- (perhaps never?) understood dimensions of history as it unfolds. Treating poems as mediating technologies in competition with others (the microscope and the newspaper, for instance), Goodman explores negative emotion in order to understand the limits of communication across space and time—the distortion at the edges of every transmission of experience. In at least two ways, Goodman is the exception that proves the rule that anxiety remains sutured together with ethics in the present intellectual climate. First, her work is one of the only recent examples in literary studies of an innovative theory of anxiety—one, that is, that does not resort to the habitual equation. Second, the fact that Goodman does not give serious thought to the way positive or neutral affect might also register certain kinds of historical experience "in solution" is symptomatic of the general suspicion of those emotions throughout the field. It may be that she has an argument in mind about the reasons these particular poems can only register the not-yet-understood as forms of anxiety, but the fact that she does not have to make that argument—the fact that it would never occur to most readers that carelessness or nonchalance might register history "in solution"—is evidence of the habitual privilege the discipline grants anxiety. It seems possible, in some situations and in some texts, that the clarity of the Lockean idea might generate discomfort, while the illegible might correlate with indifference or even with a frisson of pleasure. Montaigne's nonchalance, for instance, never seems to correlate with cognitive mastery or epistemological certainty.

Without any claim to comprehensiveness, my discussion of the theoretical constraints that inhibit the development of Emotion Studies has encompassed various forms of philosophical reflection, as well as literary subfields beyond the early modern period (Goodman's Romanticism and Ngai's Modernism). What joins these discourses together is the habitual equation between emotional and corporeal vitality: powerful emotion is thought to generate action, while muted feeling can only signal submission to the pressures of the world. The most successful studies of emotion—Terada's and Goodman's—leave this assumption behind, but not without bearing its subtle imprint. The primacy of emotional "difficulty" in Terada's account and of discomfort in Goodman's are echoes of critical tendencies that hinder my project. As I begin to chart the course of casual indifference through early modernity, I take Terada and Goodman's arguments as points of departure. But unlike either of them, I am interested in specifying that the *structural* difficulties of self-awareness, as well as the *cognitive* difficulties of experiencing history as it unfolds, need not correlate with *emotional* difficulty. Montaigne, for instance, describes a calm acceptance of the self-distancing rhythms of thought, as well as the incomprehensible fluctuations of a world that eludes cognition.

Chapter 1

The Montaignian Moment: On the Affect of Baconian “Advancement”

Horkheimer and Adorno’s account of Francis Bacon’s philosophy of science remains influential in contemporary permutations of Critical Theory—to say nothing of the humanities and social sciences in general. In the opening pages of their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Bacon is an avatar of the Enlightenment’s instrumental logic: he embodies the will to dominate and exploit the natural world. In a sequence of declarative statements, unencumbered by qualification, or even much in the way of explanation, Horkheimer and Adorno impute qualities to Bacon that seem to belong to themselves: mastery, certainty, and ruthlessness. “Although not a mathematician,” they write,

Bacon well understood the scientific temper which was to come after him. The ‘happy match’ between human understanding and the nature of things that he envisaged is a patriarchal one: the mind, conquering superstition, is to rule over disenchanted nature. Knowledge, which is power, knows no limits, either in its enslavement of creation or in its deference to worldly masters. (2)

With little ado, Horkheimer and Adorno present the reader with an image of Bacon as modernity’s arch-exploiter—an image that will have remarkable staying power.¹⁸ Bacon takes chimerical shape before the reader’s eyes as both a slave driver and a toady: he embodies the will to exert total control over nature, unencumbered by any ethical principle that would prevent its mistreatment by powerful interests. In this way, Bacon seems to propose an extreme sort of teleology: under the dominion of science, nature becomes the purest means to human ends. The natural world loses its complexity, retaining only its capacity to be manipulated.

Horkheimer and Adorno’s line of reasoning makes the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* itself a good example of the teleology it describes. The book does not interpret Bacon’s natural philosophy so much as make cavalier use of it. Here, Bacon is not a historical figure, not the author of diverse writings, and not even, as one might expect, a synecdoche of Enlightenment in general—of which Adorno and Horkheimer present a nuanced view, exploring the interrelation of rational illumination and its others across Western intellectual history. Bacon does not receive such care: he is a metaphor for a single dimension of scientific thought, the subordination of (objective) means to (subjective) ends, and is thus only a means to Horkheimer and Adorno’s ends. The historical narrative around him is likewise teleological: he “understood” what “was to come after him,” they say, as if he presided over historical developments he cannot even be said to have witnessed. In these pages, Bacon is no more than a name for one of the more aggressive impulses of modern science.

¹⁸ For the most polemical instance of this phenomenon, see Merchant, especially Chapter 7, which reads Bacon’s project as an attempt to legitimize the exploitation of both women and the natural world (the former frequently figuring the latter in early modern culture). Discussing Bacon’s promotion of experiment and the metaphors of torture that attend it, Merchant writes, “This method, so readily applicable when nature is denoted by the female gender, degraded and made possible the exploitation of the natural environment” (169). I take Merchant’s argument seriously as a critique of one strand of masculinist scientism, but I am more interested in the competing, sometimes anti-misogynist energies of Bacon’s prose.

I propose that a patient examination of Bacon’s philosophy of science reveals an alternative to the narrative that places instrumental reason and teleological progress at the heart of early modern intellectual history. The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is an appropriate point of departure because it clarifies what dominant interpretations of Bacon’s natural philosophy are missing: Bacon promotes the forward march of technological power in exactly the fashion proposed by the critical theorists, and yet, I suggest, he also introduces a non-teleological mode of observation and cognition to natural philosophy. Bacon celebrates what he calls the “advancement” or “proficiency” of learning, but such improvement implies both the now familiar notion of the accumulation of knowledge and technology over time *and* a mode of scientific observation that withdraws from linear time. This latter dimension of Bacon’s project undercuts his teleological impulses—as well as Horkheimer and Adorno’s—but it only comes into view when an unusual criterion is met: the affective dimensions of natural philosophy have to be taken seriously. The aim of the present chapter is to do just that. My argument revises popular accounts of the emergence of modern science that derive from both the Frankfurt School and the historiography of early modern Europe. With respect to the field of Critical Theory, I suggest that the scientific imagination offers a powerful self-critique that counters the triumph of instrumental reason in late modernity. With an eye on Early Modern Studies, I show that the Scientific Revolution needs to be understood not only as an epistemological breakthrough but also as an emotional one; indeed, I propose that the latter enabled the former.¹⁹

I advance these twin arguments by exploring Bacon’s debt to Michel de Montaigne, the fact of which should raise no eyebrows; my hope is that the nature of the debt will raise a fair number. Section I establishes a context for my argument by offering a critique of scholarly accounts of seventeenth-century science, many of which resonate with Horkheimer and Adorno’s. Section II describes the peculiar disposition of “nonchalance” Montaigne attributes to himself in the first chapter of the third volume of the *Essais* (“De l’utile et de l’honneste”), arguing that such a disposition, despite its suggestion of passivity, enables a mode of ethical engagement that counters the violence of the civil wars to which Montaigne bore repeated, unenthusiastic witness. Section III turns to the final chapter of that volume (“De l’expérience”) in order to show the epistemological consequences of Montaigne’s insouciant persona. Finally, Section IV demonstrates that Bacon’s *Advancement of Learning* adopts the constellation of ethics, emotion, and epistemology the foregoing sections have excavated from Montaigne’s *Essais* and considers the implications of such a debt for a new history of the emergence of modern science.

My argument suggests a philological relationship between Bacon and Montaigne’s respective discussions of affect, pointing out that they both theorize modes of feeling that

¹⁹ Shapin begins his introductory handbook to the Scientific Revolution with the following words: “There was no such thing as the Scientific Revolution, and this is a book about it” (*The Scientific Revolution* 1). I share Shapin’s skepticism about the traditional understanding of seventeenth-century scientific developments as together constitutive of a coherent, climactic event—as well as his willingness to use the term in order to avow the inevitable presentism of research in this field. The “Scientific Revolution” names a set of developments in natural philosophy that historians have grouped together in the interest of understanding the dominant features of present-day scientific inquiry. This does not mean the past will be reconstituted in the image of the present—only that the historiographer will acknowledge that present-day interests cannot help but guide historical research.

discourage passionate intensity through similarly unconventional readings of the same passage from Lucretius. My genealogical point is not simply that Bacon, whose interest in Montaigne is made plain by his own set of imitative *Essays* (1597), also seeks to evade passion's pressure. The possibility that Bacon actually inherits his theory of affect from Montaigne is strongly suggested by the fact that both of them offer their most philosophically adventurous descriptions of muted feeling—linking irenic ethics with intellectual openness—while quoting the same lines from Lucretius, mobilizing Epicureanism without claiming it as their own. More interesting than this genealogical relationship, however, is the structural resemblance of their theories.

In “De l’utile et de l’honneste,” “nonchalance” signals a rejection of the violence of civil war without suggesting a disengagement from ethical activity. Muted experiences of emotion do not preclude action. They discourage violence, and they encourage forms of peaceful cooperation rather than self-assertion—that is, the weakening of self-interest in favor of an attunement to the conflicting interests of others. “Nonchalance” is a mode of feeling and a mode of activity, but it does not foreclose the possibility of any other feeling or activity. As an open invitation to contingencies, it is peculiarly hospitable to the violence it discourages. Montaigne theorizes this unconditional form of openness by offering an idiosyncratic account of momentary experience. He suggests that “nonchalance” disarticulates the present moment from those that precede and follow it, thereby freeing it from the constraint of narrative.²⁰ The subtlety of Montaigne’s argument derives from the suggestion that the present moment is not simply the comfortable space of the self-evident. Instead, it is an experience outside temporal continuity upon which other moments nonetheless retain influence. Montaigne understands the present moment as detached from other ones without being isolated from them.

Montaigne’s “De l’expérience” derives an epistemology from this account of the ethics of muted feeling. The final chapter of the *Essays* suggests that the experience of the disarticulated moment is a rejection of specific modes of systematic thought. The violence of legalism and philosophical rigor derive from exactly the sort of zealotry from which Montaigne withdraws in the earlier chapter. A system that demands particular kinds of knowledge is guilty of the sort of impassioned insistence he fears, even if it takes the impersonal form of a philosophy of knowledge. Montaigne offers an escape from those habits of mind. What might be called “the Montaignian moment”—the experience of the momentary as a withdrawal from temporal continuity—is now explicitly understood as a mode of perception and cognition. The Montaignian moment is a space of openness to the contingencies of the present, which might be erased by the sort of imposition of precedent by which systematic thought is distinguished. But again, it is not a promise of perceptual plenitude. It is irreducible to the logical cohesion of systems without claiming the privilege of unmediated experience.

In the *Advancement*, Bacon models his psychology of “learning” on Montaignian “nonchalance,” but he also presents a strategy for controlling the waywardness of that psychology. If the casually indifferent observer engages the world without prior motivation or specific desires, then she endlessly wanders through it. Bacon responds to the threat of such aimlessness by reintroducing all the modes of cognition Montaigne rejects—but *outside* the

²⁰ It is worth noting that *disarticulation*, a word both rare and archaic, is central to my argument, capturing as no other term does the highly specific operation whereby something (in this case, linear time) is separated “joint from joint” (as the OED has it). The image of the separation and spacing of moments (as distinguished from the simple abandonment of linear time) is emblematic of Montaignian temporality.

psychology of “learning.” He protects the unique purchase on contingency of the Montaignian moment but seems to offer some hope of managing its waywardness by enforcing a zealous brand of teleology with respect to the accumulation of data over time: this is the aspect of his program on which Horkheimer and Adorno fix their inquisitorial gaze. But Bacon’s scientific program draws together seemingly antithetical impulses: it opens the door to an experience of sensory and emotional openness, but embeds that errant experience within a system that carefully steers the process of discovery. My point is not that Bacon undermines the Montaignian moment he installs at the center of his system: on the contrary, he subtly promotes it by marking his teleological promises as flights of wayward fancy. Bacon’s teleology is an ironic alibi for the fundamental waywardness of his proposals—a waywardness ensured by the “nonchalance” that makes discovery possible in the first place. Bacon surely promotes the forward march of intellectual labor, but such movement is only loosely directional: it strides away from the tautologies of self-enclosed knowledge systems, but no farther than the disorienting space of the unforeseen.

Ultimately, the chapters that follow this one will ask that readers hear “the Montaignian moment” in a second sense: not only as a theory of momentary experience, but also as the “moment” in English cultural history when that theory bore heavily upon developments in literature and the sciences, generating further experiments with a mode of muted feeling that reshaped ethics and epistemology by concentrating time into the narrow but paradoxically spacious confines of the momentary.

I. *Sprezzatura*’s Afterlife: Leisurely Exertions of the Experimentalist

Many recent accounts of the Scientific Revolution by historians and literary scholars have emphasized the importance of Castiglione’s conception of *sprezzatura* to the natural philosophers of the seventeenth century. It would be easy to understand my project as a version of theirs, but the account I offer is almost the opposite in its implications. Scholars like Mario Biagioli, Paula Findlen, Steven Shapin, and Jay Tribbi have countered disembodied versions of the history of science—which proceed by recounting a sequence of theories and discoveries²¹—by insisting on the social dimensions of knowledge production. Shapin, for example, argues that the culture of experimental science in seventeenth-century England should be understood as a form of aristocratic conversation: the establishment of factuality, he explains, relies on conventions of uprightness and truthfulness imported into the laboratory from feudal, humanist, and Christian codes of conduct (64). Referring approvingly to Tribbi’s work, which describes the experiments of seventeenth-century Florence as practices that had the power to “enhance one’s reputation as a civil interlocutor,” and to Biagioli’s, which treats Galileo’s scientific achievements as the ambitious courtier’s bids for social advancement, Shapin writes: “Some of the best recent cultural studies of science display strands of early modern Italian science as a courtly version of civil conversation: scientific discourse was a species of *sprezzatura*” (120).

My interest is the reverse of this. Scientific discourse was indeed a species of *sprezzatura*, in the sense that it was a social practice governed by rules of self-presentation similar to what one finds in Castiglione, but I would insist as well on the opposite formulation: “*sprezzatura* was a species of science,” where *sprezzatura* is understood not simply as a strategic pose but also as a mode of feeling with epistemological consequences. These consequences, I

²¹ Koyré is the classic example of such an approach.

suggest, are a decisive revision of natural philosophy. My argument is no less dependent on the social context of science than Shapin's, but it presupposes the less familiar notion that cognition changes in conjunction with disposition—that the development of new modes of feeling can encourage new modes of understanding. Montaigne's cultivation of "nonchalance" grants access to the realm of experience upon which the discoveries of Shapin's virtuosi depend.²² Bacon's achievement is to recognize the Montaignian link between emotion and epistemology and to theorize a natural philosophy predicated on Montaigne's brand of casual indifference.

For my argument to gain traction, *sprezzatura* must escape the scholarly discourse that presently controls its interpretation. The concept has proven remarkably generative of insights about the culture depicted in Castiglione's *Il libro del cortegiano* and the court of Elizabeth I, which eagerly consumed translations of that text.²³ Most of those insights speak to the calculative dimension of *sprezzatura*—exactly what Montaigne would exclude from his adaptation of Castiglione's ethos. The scholarship's near unanimity of interest in *sprezzatura* as a form of calculation should come as no surprise, given Castiglione's initial account of the motives behind the practice:

Ma avendo io già più volte pensato meco onde nasca questa grazia, lasciando quegli che dalle stelle l'hanno, trovo una regola universalissima, la qual mi par valer circa questo in tutte le cose umane che si facciano o dicano più che alcuna altra: e ciò fuggir quanto più si può, e como un asperissimo e pericoloso scoglio, la affettazione; e, per dir forse una nuova parola, usar in ogni cosa una certa sprezzatura, che nasconda l'arte, e dimostri, ciò che si fa e dice venir fatto senza fatica e quasi senza pensarvi. (59)

But having before now often considered whence this grace springs, laying aside those men who have it by nature, I find one universal rule concerning it, which seems to me worth more in this matter than any other in all things human that are done or said: and that is to avoid affectation to the uttermost and as it were a very sharp and dangerous rock; and, to use possibly a new word, to practice in everything a certain nonchalance [*sprezzatura*] that shall conceal design and show that what is done and said is done without effort and almost without thought. (35)

Castiglione's remarks are prescriptive: *sprezzatura* is a strategic norm ("una regola universalissima") for social success at the court of the Duke of Urbino. The auditors in Castiglione's dialogue are instructed to "conceal" ("nasconda") whatever "effort" ("fatica") their activities require; they can count on winning favor by acting as if all their victories (from the flawless performance of a piece of music to the most eloquent sort of speech) were easily achieved. Castiglione's offhanded remark that there are some whose "grazia" comes "dalle stelle" suggests that *sprezzatura* always raises the specter of dissimulation. The courtier not only

²² For a compelling account of the relationship between Montaigne's "nonchalance" and Castiglione's *sprezzatura*, see Tetel.

²³ For a discussion of the importance of Castiglione to Elizabethan poetry, see Javitch, who argues that the courtier's feigned nonchalance, his dissimulating powers, and his serious mode of playfulness were well-suited for poetic emulation—which was less true of the rhetorical tradition foregoing scholars of poetry had emphasized.

calculates the fabrication of effortlessness; he regards the seemingly effortless achievements of others with suspicion. One imagines the inhabitants of Castiglione's world collectively narrowing their eyes: since one's own actions, down to the most insignificant gesture, must be carefully strategized, the actions of others must likewise be scrutinized for hidden cunning.

Although their projects differ considerably, Frank Whigham and Harry Berger, Jr. converge in their account of *sprezzatura* as a norm that generates exactly this sort of atmosphere: one in which every "word or deed" had to be anxiously and ambitiously premeditated. Whigham studies Elizabethan courtesy literature in order to understand the way its conventions were deployed by the ruling elite and those striving for inclusion in a struggle for power that had only just begun: an increase in social mobility toward the end of the sixteenth century meant that social interaction had to be meticulously calculated. For Whigham, then, *sprezzatura* is interesting because of its "development beyond the antecedent classical categories of *venustas* and *gratia*," which had been "restricted to art, literature, oratory, or female beauty, aesthetic categories mostly marginal to the realm of power," pertaining now instead "to the political zone of power at court, and especially to actions that take place before the eyes of the prince and his court" (93). Berger's understanding of *sprezzatura*, which he derives from Italian courtesy books (including Castiglione's), hinges on the same problem of "actions that take place before the eyes" of others, though he includes the self in that suspicious audience, giving the term a repressive dimension. "The successful courtier," he writes,

makes other people's desires his desires as he evacuates—or represses or disowns—and devalues whatever desires don't conform. Destroying what he perceives as the natural in order to reconstruct and resurrect it on the model of the idea, he aspires to enstatue himself in the hopes that the hard classical shell of his courtly second nature will both protect and conceal him from the world—and from himself. (227-8)

Here, the imitation of effortlessness becomes a mode of self-regulation. Though Whigham's depiction of *sprezzatura* as a mode of strategic posturing belongs specifically to the Elizabethan case, Berger locates a similar phenomenon in his Italian sources, but insists that such posturing extends beyond the realm of social competition into one's own experience of oneself; his central interest is "self-representation" (12). The courtier must convince his social equals and superiors that his achievements come naturally to him, but such an imperative ends up requiring that he convince himself of that same fallacious fact. Though Berger has left the realm of social competition for the hall of mirrors of self-reflexivity, he retains a conception of *sprezzatura* as a norm that generates anxiety about the duplicities of representation.

For Bacon (and, as subsequent chapters will argue, for many of those who drew inspiration from his renovation of natural philosophy), *sprezzatura* was not simply a simulacrum of effortlessness; on the contrary, it was a mode of feeling that had ethical concerns as its origin and a new epistemology as its consequence. (It is for this reason that Montaigne rather than Castiglione is the key figure in the emotional prehistory of objectivity: as I explain below, it is Montaigne who first suggests that "nonchalance" encourages a species of induction.) Such a claim revises the historiography of experimental science and experimentalism, a field recently granted new life by Joanna Picciotto, who describes the efforts of scientists, poets, and other Englishmen and women to reinvent intellectual labor through collective identification with the figure of prelapsarian Adam. Drawing on Bacon's interpretation of Adam's naming of the

creatures at Genesis 2:19 as an exemplary scene of intellectual labor (his names are not arbitrary, but derived from observation of the creatures' properties), experimentalists seek to develop practices and technologies that grant them innocence of vision—a “view from before” the corruption of the body. I propose to supplement this account by describing it as a revolution in the theory of emotion. Even when experimental observation was described as the strenuous reconstruction of Adamic innocence through self-discipline, such innocence was frequently characterized by what Montaigne calls “nonchalance”—an experience of muted affect that yields new visions of creation.

Such a combination of emotional ease and physical exertion was only possible because the relationship between feeling and activity had been reinvented by early modern literary texts: Montaigne, more than any other figure, reconfigured Stoic conventions (which aligned steely impassivity with virtuous action and impassioned states with error)²⁴ so that a very different sort of indifference—casual, unlabored, tinged with emotion—could take pride of place as a precondition for ethical engagement.²⁵ My description of this incipient theory of affect opens a new perspective on Picciotto's account of the difference between Renaissance literary figures and their experimentalist successors. She draws a contrast between Renaissance “fictions” and experimentalist “instruments of truth”: the first category suggests that literary composition is an idle pastime in which the author dreams up fanciful realms in the hope that they will have a pedagogical bearing on the world, while the second eschews make-believe and actually intervenes in the world, estranging it in order to “see through” it (14-15). I affirm the transition Picciotto describes but propose a qualification: as one conception of the literary gave way to another, the emotional corollaries of the former had a remarkable staying power. Even as Baconians cast aspersions on idle imagination and leisurely craftsmanship, a *purely emotional* leisureliness persisted in some of their most highly wrought textual experiments. In Montaigne's *Essais*, he makes the counterintuitive suggestion that feelings that seem well suited to gratuitous fantasy actually encourage the most strenuous sort of ethical engagement—and this conception of exertion through casual indifference comes to characterize the interventions of the experimentalists. The sometimes-literal ease of the Renaissance poet²⁶ becomes the emotional ease of the experimentalist author; and emotional disengagement, a mode of engagement.

²⁴ Justus Lipsius is the key figure in the Renaissance revival of Stoicism. For me, it is important to distinguish between Montaignian nonchalance and Neostoic impassivity without making a caricatured foil of Lipsius, for whom “constancy” is no simplistic stubbornness. Like Montaigne, he rejects “obstinacy,” which he describes as “a certain hardness of a stubborn mind,” but his emphasis falls on strength, rather than weakness, and fortitude, rather than openness to contingency, and in these ways he exemplifies the differences between Montaignian and Stoic emotion. “‘Constancy,’” he writes, “is a right and immovable strength of the mind, neither lifted up nor pressed down with external or casual accidents” (37).

²⁵ In Book VI of *The Faerie Queene*, Edmund Spenser offers an alternative to the sort of violent psychomachia typical of the five preceding books (epitomized by the destruction of the Bowr of Bliss in Book II), depicting a gentle, paradoxical experience of gratification without desire that resonates with Montaigne's “nonchalance”—but an extended discussion of Spenser exceeds the bounds of this chapter.

²⁶ As Picciotto explains, “Sidney flaunted the leisure that was the enabling condition for his literary pursuits, notoriously referring to himself as one ‘who (I knowe not by what mischance) in these my not old yeres & idelest times, having slipt into the title of a Poet’ (“Labors” 14).

My description of the transformation of leisure from a condition of (real or feigned) material comfort into an experience of exclusively emotional neutrality casts a new light on recent accounts of the relationship between literature and science in early modernity. Picciotto has pointed out that scholarship in this field tends to explore mere resemblances between literature and science, focusing exclusively on the “thematic or propositional *content* of literature and scientific theories,” which, as one might expect, often seems to pass seamlessly from the latter to the former (13). Indeed, this passage almost always seems unidirectional: scholars grant science causal supremacy, asking how literature pictures or responds to scientific discoveries.²⁷ Ultimately, my account avoids fixing causal relationships between different disciplines (or assuming the clear distinction between categories like “literature” and “science” in early modernity)—but here, in my opening discussion of Montaigne and Bacon, I seek to expose the erroneousness of the assumption that science drives and dominates literary writing by emphasizing the debt of the former to the latter. The literary invention of the natural philosopher’s muted feeling—an event anticipated and perhaps initiated by Montaigne—sets the mechanical philosophy in motion.

My approach is not simply a corrective to the tendency to read literature as an aftereffect of science; it also responds to the even more habitual association of science with a conception of indifference anathema to my own. Without my attention to a heretofore overlooked theory of indifference—which is not to be confused with the mere suppression of the passions, and which, in part for that reason, I distinguish from Stoic *apatheia*—the account I offer would come as no surprise. It goes without saying that modern conceptions of objectivity imply the avoidance of impassioned states—as does the observation that literature must have responded in some way to the emergence of natural philosophical dispassion. Indeed, these sorts of claims are common in early modern literary and intellectual history. Angus Fletcher, for instance, leaves all these intuitive relationships in place: “For literature, of course,” he writes,

numbers are cold, geometric figures are cold, equations are cold, despite their strong resemblance to metaphor, and this lowering of cognitive and emotive temperature virtually defines the gap between the two cultures... Exactly this divergence was far less strong with the traditional Aristotelian science of causes than with the new post-Copernican science of physical laws; yet in a final paradox, the great writing of the Renaissance was inspired by the new, not the older science. With the decline of Aristotle’s prestige in science, the heat of poetry must come from the cold flames of the new science. (20)

²⁷ Even as nuanced and persuasive an account as Rogers’, which by no means represents literature as a passive reflection of scientific theory, treats the latter as a *given* that writers reconfigure and reimagine in relation to politics. Rogers does not consider the pressure literary texts might exert on scientific discoveries themselves. Picciotto is an important exception to this trend. She describes changes in literary form that follow from a new understanding of intellectual labor that is as much the work of Gerrard Winstanley as it is of Francis Bacon: her account of the literary reinvention of mimesis as the “transform[ation] of the inert looking glass into a penetrating lens” is not an account of the impact of science on literature (14). Instead, literature and science together transform under the pressure of a new conception of intellectual labor that does not derive from a single discipline but from a wide-ranging intellectual movement.

What if, on the contrary, the cool intensity of the new science had to come from the muted emotion of literary writing? What if literature taught natural philosophy how to lower its temperature? Ultimately, as I have indicated, the point is not to locate the absolute origin of what I have been calling “casual indifference” or “nonchalance,” but to resist the temptation to delimit “science” as a field that concerns itself only with knowledge. To understand the earliest chapter in the history of modern science as a literary phenomenon, and to see epistemological changes as emotional ones—these two insights require a revision of the story we have long been telling ourselves about what objectivity was, is, and promises to be.

II. Montaigne’s Lucretius; or, What is Emotional Pacifism?

“De l’utile et de l’honneste” begins by attributing “nonchalance” to its author and to his mode of composition: the style of the *Essais* is a corollary of the author’s casual indifference. Montaigne excuses himself for speaking foolishly, suggesting that foolishness follows from casual speech, and that only labored foolishness would embarrass him. The *Essais*, Montaigne explains, derive from the careless gambol of the mind: they are offhand observations rather than careful conclusions, and any reader who desires a sustained, coherent argument will find only disappointment in these pages. Montaigne writes:

Personne n’est exempt de dire des fadaïses. Le malheur est de les dire curieusement. *Nae iste magno conatu magnas nugas dixerit.* Cela ne me touche pas. Les miennes m’eschappent aussi nonchallamment qu’elles le valent. D’où bien leur prend. Je les quitterois soudain, à peu de coust qu’il y eust. Et ne les achette, ny les vens que ce qu’elles poisent. Je parle au papier comme je parle au premier que je rencontre. Qu’il soit vrai, voicy dequoy. (5)

Montaigne defends his “fadaïses”—his nonsensical or frivolous remarks—on the grounds that they inhere in his writing practice. He “speaks” (“parle”) to his writing paper as he does to any random acquaintance, and thus all manner of nonsense will undoubtedly “escape him” (“m’eschappent”). The emotional quality that generates these casual blunders is “nonchalance” (he lets them slip “nonchallamment”). Montaigne’s introductory self-description indicates the most salient features of this disposition, which remains a persistent interest throughout the *Essais*: it is a mode of feeling that encourages particular kinds of activity (a wandering mind and a correspondingly slapdash mode of speech); it promotes the disarticulation of one moment from the next (“Je les quitterois soudain,” Montaigne writes, carelessly leaving his verbal blunders behind rather than trying to correct them); it takes ethical relations as a model for writing (Montaigne treats the page as if it were an interpersonal encounter); and it seems to belong to the form of the *Essais* themselves (“Qu’il soit vrai, voicy dequoy,” Montaigne writes, as if the remainder of the chapter were evidence of the attitude in question). “De l’utile et de l’honneste” is an extended account of “nonchalance,” one that seeks not only to describe that disposition but to manifest its properties in the medium of writing.

The easiest way to understand the status of “nonchalance” as a rubric for interpreting the remainder of the chapter is to observe Montaigne’s continual concern with the famous opening lines of Book II of *De Rerum Natura*. Toward the beginning of the chapter, Montaigne cites Lucretius’s well-known remark about the pleasures of witnessing the suffering of others, but his interpretation of those lines is actually an act of self-reflection: his commentary on Lucretius

describes his own experience of emotional effortlessness.²⁸ Lucretius writes: “Suave, mari magno, turbantibus aequora ventis, / E terra magnum alterius spectare laborem” (94). In both early and late modern contexts, the Lucretian observation is often understood as an insight about the differential dimension of pleasure: the “sweetness” (*suave*) of observing someone else’s suffering, which derives from a sense that one has been spared such suffering oneself.²⁹ Montaigne confirms the standard interpretation before clarifying the specific stakes of his own: “...au milieu de la compassion,” he writes, “nous sentons au dedans je ne sçay quelle aigre-douce pointe de volupté maligne à voir souffrir autrui...” (6). In this observation, as in most responses to Lucretian “volupté maligne,” the specificity of the Lucretian image fades from view. Lucretius describes an observer standing on the safety of dry land, feeling compassion and secret pleasure as she observes victims of shipwreck or some other ocean catastrophe struggling to survive in the open water. Montaigne’s comment suggests that the operative distinction in Lucretius is between pleasure and pain—or perhaps, more closely approximating the image of the shipwreck, between safety and danger.

Yet the remainder of Montaigne’s text repeats and transforms the Lucretian image, drawing on another opposition implicit in these lines—that between relaxation and strain. For Montaigne, as for Lucretius, the key word is *laborem*: where land meets sea, effortlessness meets exertion. The speaker of *De Rerum Natura* is not the observer of suffering in general, but of an experience of peril that requires the anguished labor of bare survival. Indeed, the lines which follow in Lucretius’s poem juxtapose serene observation and ambitious striving, contrary states that confirm the Lucretian emphasis on freedom from labor.³⁰ Throughout “De l’utile et de l’honneste,” Montaigne returns to images of shipwreck and stormy weather in order to picture this freedom—and for Montaigne, such freedom has been rendered exclusively emotional. Rejecting the Lucretian imperative to secure oneself against the dangers of the world, Montaigne cultivates a species of emotional ease that accommodates even the most perilous pursuits.

Generally speaking, Montaigne’s interest in “De l’utile et de l’honneste” is the ethical problem of entering another’s service. Becoming the means to another’s end, one submits to

²⁸ Translations of Lucretius are from Smith.

²⁹ As the rest of my discussion will amply illustrate, I am skeptical of Blumenberg’s reading of these lines and of Montaigne’s interpretation of them: “These lines [from Lucretius] are explained [by Montaigne] only by the assertion that the fundamental preconditions of our life would be destroyed if we were to try to root out these questionable qualities in men. Montaigne does not justify the spectator of shipwreck by his right to enjoyment; rather, he justifies his pleasure, positively described as malicious (*volupté maligne*), by his successful self-preservation. By virtue of his capacity for distance, he stands unimpaired on the solid ground of shore. He survives through one of his useless qualities: the ability to be a spectator” (17). Montaigne does not promote spectatorship, understood in opposition to participation, and, more to the point, he does not cite Lucretius simply to affirm the pleasures of malice as constitutive of human nature. On the contrary, as the remainder of my argument discusses at length, these lines from Lucretius figure emotional ease.

³⁰ “But nothing is more blissful than to occupy the heights effectively fortified by the teaching of the wise, tranquil sanctuaries from which you can look down upon others and see them wandering everywhere in their random search for the way of life, competing for intellectual eminence, disputing about rank, and striving night and day with prodigious effort to scale the summit of wealth and to secure power” (35).

heteronomy, often with disastrous consequences. Montaigne's discussion is replete with horrific examples of such consequences: disembowelment and castration are only two of the many punishments visited upon those unwise enough to commit themselves to another's ambitions in these increasingly calamitous pages. Contrary to most readings of the chapter,³¹ however, Montaigne does not promote passivity as an alternative to dangerous engagement—no matter how dire the possible consequences of the latter. By pitting himself and the historical figures he discusses against the stormy weather and treacherous seas of *De Rerum Natura*, he pictures a mode of risk-taking in which emotional ease reduces the likelihood of violence without any guarantee of invulnerability.

Thus, for example, Montaigne poses the following question, eschewing an historical account of the incident he mentions in favor of another Lucretian metaphor of virtuous emotional ease: "Fut-ce pas Atticus, lequel tenant au juste party, et au party qui perdit, se sauva par sa moderation en cet universel naufrage du monde, parmy tant de mutations et diversitez?" (7-8). The Lucretian shipwreck becomes the "universel naufrage du monde," a condition of generalized chaos, and Atticus saves himself through "moderation." Such successful self-protection is not an abstention from action but an equanimity that ensures the smooth navigation of waters rendered treacherous by the turbulence of "mutations et diversitez." Indeed, even such smooth navigation should not be understood as a form of security, since Atticus retains his commitment to a cause that is no less doomed for being "juste": the "party qui perdit." The sort of "moderation" Montaigne has in mind does not ensure any success other than a freedom from the wreckage of violent passion and a concomitant dedication to "just[ice]."

Montaigne emphasizes this point in the following paragraph, bringing the figure of stormy weather into his meditation on ethical "engagement" (8). Here and in his remark on Atticus, Montaigne is at his most Stoic: the masculine ethos of self-control lends itself to the defense of indifference as a mode of political participation. Yet Montaigne's verb for the storm's harmless passage is "couler," and this term—a Montaignian refrain—underscores those dimensions of Montaigne's indifference that resist Stoic *apatheia*. In order to negotiate historical violence, Montaigne suggests, one should "glide" through it or allow it to "glide" peacefully past. If gliding is a form of engagement, and if, as I discuss at length below, it suggests a certain suppleness or flexibility in the face of conflict, then it describes a mode of activity that is non- or even anti-Stoic in its embrace of vulnerability. Montaigne writes:

³¹ Even Quint, whose account of Montaigne's "ethos of yielding" resonates with my own description of "nonchalance," paints Montaigne as a quietist, though one who acknowledges the limits of quietism. "It is one of the weaknesses," Quint writes, "of Montaigne's ethics and of the political submission they underwrite that he appears to suggest that there is little if anything one can do to oppose the actions of a ruler" ("Montaigne" 144). For Montaigne, though, emotional pliancy need not translate into blanket obedience to political authority. I want to stress the point that virtuous action is actually a corollary of Montaignian equanimity. Starobinski touches on this dimension of Montaigne's ethics, but does not develop it. For Montaigne, he says, "Il faut...prendre parti, et agir en conséquence....[Montaigne] prescrit la sauvegarde du <<repos>> et de la sérénité intérieurs, non seulement dans l'intérêt de l'individu, mais pour mieux assurer la justice et l'efficacité de l'action entreprise" (315). As my argument makes plain, however, "repos" cannot be understood as a "sauvegarde."

Toutesfois ceux encore qui s’y engagent tout à fait, le peuvent avec tel ordre et attrempance que l’orage devra couler par dessus leur teste sans offence... Et j’en cognois, entre ceux qui y ouvrent valeureusement à cette heure, de meurs ou si equables ou si douces qu’ils seront pour demeurer debout, quelque injurieuse mutation et cheute que le ciel nous appreste. (8)

One can engage whole-heartedly without permitting oneself to be goaded toward zealous intensity by the chaos of conflict. The storm glides overhead “sans offence” if one maintains “meurs” that are either “equables” or “douces.” Such images of steadfastness—a capacity to “demeurer debout”—remain strongly suggestive of Stoic virtue, but the Lucretian language of *douceur* (Lucretius’s word is “suave”) confirms that a certain sweetness and amiability have softened the rigors of a Seneca or Lipsius. Indeed, Lucretian sweetness recurs over the course of the chapter, and always in connection with virtue. Montaigne attributes “douceur” to Epaminondas (often a stand-in for his beloved friend La Boétie, who died 25 years before the composition of these lines)³², associated here with a sort of martial valor leavened by gentleness of feeling: “C’est miracle de pouvoir mesler à telles actions [feats of military prowess] quelque image de justice; mais il n’appartient qu’à la roideur d’Epaminondas d’y pouvoir mesler la douceur et la facilité des meurs les plus molles et la pure innocence” (17). An ethos of masculine constancy has begun to merge with an alternate ethos that privileges softness of feeling and the accommodation of contingencies. To anticipate the effect such ethical modes of feeling would eventually have on the epistemological project Picciotto describes as a “labor of innocence,” it is instructive to notice that Montaigne refers to this gentle flexibility in the midst of conflict as “pure innocence.” A state of innocence is also one of muted warmth.

Montaigne adapts the imagery of Lucretian weather to his discussion of diplomacy, a mode of political engagement that particularly concerns him,³³ describing the ambassador’s task as an attempt to “glide in turbulent water” [“couler en eau trouble”]. Montaigne’s account of the ambassador’s disposition places emphasis on the alliance of practical engagement and emotional disengagement. In fact, this connection suggests that a term like “emotional disengagement” is not quite right: emotional freedom from passionate attachment need not imply disengagement from the task at hand. Montaigne writes:

Rien n’empêche qu’on ne se puisse comporter commodément entre des hommes qui se sont ennemis, et loyalement conduisez vous y d’une, sinon par tout esgale affection (car elle peut souffrir differentes mesures), mais au moins temperée, et qui ne vous engage tant à l’un qu’il puisse tout requerir de vous; et vous contentez aussi d’une moienne mesure de leur grace et de couler en eau trouble sans y vouloir pescher. (9)

³² I thank Timothy Hampton for his insight into the relationship between Montaigne’s Epaminondas and La Boétie.

³³ See Chapter 2 in Hampton (“Fictions”) for a treasure trove of insights that resonate with the argument I advance in these pages; his comments on the affinity between Montaigne’s diplomacy of non-dissimulation and his writing style have been especially instructive: “Montaigne’s diplomatic rhetoric, which changes a message without in fact changing it, parallels a writing that produces itself out of what is already known...” (69).

Montaigne describes diplomacy as a practice that depends on affective equilibrium: it requires that one remain without passionate attachments to either party to negotiation. Crucially, however, no matter how tepid the ambassador's feelings, he must nonetheless conduct himself "loyalement." His mode of ethical engagement is an unfeigned commitment to his master *and* to his own status as intermediary, which requires a disposition that precludes total assimilation to the desires of the master. Indeed, the loyal performance of the ambassador's duty is exactly that freedom from total assimilation. Your master, Montaigne explains, must not be permitted to "require all of you" ["tout requerir de vous"], for such commitment would reduce you to the status of an instrument.

Interestingly, however, Montaigne's warnings do not establish a clear opposition between autonomy and heteronomy. Enslaving oneself to one's own passionate investments *corresponds with* enslavement to one's master: both are species of subjugation, and the former tends to bring about the latter. Thus, throwing the reader back into the stormy sea of *De Rerum Natura*, Montaigne suggests that "vous contentez...de couler en eau trouble sans y vouloir pescher." One risks drowning when fishing for profit rather than simply keeping afloat. One wearies oneself through desperate maneuverings rather than casually paddling for shore. Such machinations bespeak both personal interest and an eagerness to please: one fishes for profit by zealously pursuing the ambitions of a single party. The alternative would be neither autonomy nor heteronomy, but instead a free-floating nonchalance in which nobody's passion achieves the force of an imperative.

In his account of the fraudulence of ethical violence, Montaigne confirms this alliance between putative duty and self-interest. As befits an apology for "nonchalance," Montaigne's descriptions of others' actions draw attention away from the stated purposes of those actions and focus instead on the emotional atmosphere in which they are performed. Just before his commentary on successful diplomacy, he offers the following critique of his countrymen's bellicose propensities:

Mais il ne faut pas appeller devoir (comme nous faisons tous les jours) une aigreur et aspreté intestine qui naist de l'interest et passion privée; ny courage, une conduite traistresse et malitieuse. Ils nomment zele leur propension vers la malignité et violence; ce n'est pas la cause qui les eschauffe, c'est leur interest; ils attisent la guerre non par ce qu'elle est juste, mais par ce que c'est guerre. (8-9)

Montaigne's analysis is linguistic: words like "devoir" and "courage," he argues, are misused when applied to those who clamor for war. Interestingly, though, Montaigne seems to have little interest in the rightness of the particular conflict in question: these words ring false not because the cause is unjust but because actions are defined by their emotional concomitants rather than their moral justifications. A vocabulary of purpose has been erroneously used in place of a vocabulary of disposition. Montaigne rejects any action characterized by a "propension vers la malignité et violence"—regardless of the specific form it takes. Just as Montaigne promotes a disposition that might characterize all manner of ethical engagement, he rejects the ethics of the *guerres civiles* on the basis of the "propension" that underwrites it rather than the specific actions it encourages. To be sure, this is a "propension" for "violence," which means it tends to generate particular forms of activity (violent ones), but it is also a "propension" for "malignité," an amorphous category defined more by its animating passions than its specific forms.

Here, then, “emotional pacifism,” a phrase I favor because it captures the ethical valence of “nonchalance,” comes more fully into view. Montaigne proposes an ethics of emotional habit, rather than an ethics of action. The curious consequence of such an ethics is that it permits violence, even if it tends to discourage it. The same goes for the ethics to which it presents an alternative: the problem with “zele” is not mainly the horror of the actions it encourages (though the chapter’s violent imagery certainly ensures the persistence of those horrors in the reader’s mind), but the discomfort of “zele” itself, which, described as an “aigreur et aspreté intestine,” loses whatever appeal it might retain. Montaigne’s plea for peace adopts a rhetoric of gentle hedonism.

This distinction between one disposition and another, between one mode of ethical feeling and another, is not only implicit in Montaigne’s critique of “zele.” In a chapter of the *Essais* that begins with a reflection on “nonchalance,” no innocent use of the verb *eschauffer* is possible. Indeed, the chapter is replete with the language of temperature, which is also the language of temperament. Here, the word “intestine” establishes a connection between violent propensities, the physiological discourse of the passions, and civil war. The *chaleur* of the zealous is contrasted with the author’s own *nonchalance*. Opposing modes of ethical behavior are continually coded hot and cold in ways that transcend but call to mind the language of humoral theory. In one of Montaigne’s most famous lines, he writes, “Je suivray le bon party jusques au feu, mais exclusivement si je puis” (7). It was Rabelais who first popularized this joke, but without Montaigne’s characteristic ending: “si je puis.”³⁴ Avoiding the “feu” means stopping short of following the “bon party” into the flames of hell, but it also means steering clear of the inflammatory passions. Montaigne’s self-deprecatory remark confirms his understanding of commitment as a general tendency rather than an unwavering obligation. Every commitment is qualified by personal weaknesses.

An ethics of tendency rather than obligation requires a limitless openness to circumstance: to glide along with the waves of experience rather than build bulwarks against contingency is to embrace danger and to expose oneself to waywardness. Such self-exposure does not sit easily with any traditional conception of ethics, yet ethical comportment is exactly what Montaigne has in mind when he speaks of nonchalance. Thus his account of the muted affect of the ambassador implies a desire to become a *medium* rather than a *subject*, a *space* of communication rather than an *agent* of that activity. “Je ne dis rien à l’un,” he writes, “que je ne puisse dire à l’autre, à son heure, l’accent seulement un peu changé; et ne rapporte que les choses ou indifferentes ou cogneuës, ou qui servent en commun” (9). As an ambassador, Montaigne is emphatically unemphatic. He conveys intelligence that he knows will matter to neither party—or that, mattering equally to both, will offer little advantage to either. He takes this practice far enough that it resembles a dereliction of duty: an ambassador who says only what everyone already knows is superfluous, if not maddening or subversive.

Yet Montaigne indicates an artistry in this performance of neutrality: his minor “chang[ement]” of “accent” suggests his activity as ambassador is *stylistic*. He offers his master a *form* of interaction with his adversary—nothing more. In this way, Montaigne’s account of diplomacy brings many features of his ethics together in a single illustration: emotional pacifism offers a political service rather than an abstention from politics; it tends to encourage nonviolence, softening friction that might generate conflict; yet it is not an obstinate refusal of violence, since it leaves open the transmission of any message the ambassador’s master might

³⁴ Frame offers a helpful explanation of this genealogy (601).

wish to convey—including, say, a declaration of war; finally, it grants linguistic style, generally speaking, a place of privilege, promising as it does exactly the sort of soft modulation of human interaction to which Montaigne aspires.

Montaigne is attuned to the dangers of such a practice. As I have noted, “De l’utile et de l’honneste” is a warning about the risks of reducing oneself to the instrument of another. Given Montaigne’s account of diplomacy, this warning can be understood as a sharpening of his account of ethics: his warning against instrumentality is significantly refined when juxtaposed with an endorsement of mediation. A medium resembles an instrument. As Montaigne describes his own merely intermediary function, his submission to the task of passing information, it is hard not to worry that such activity might belong to the category of actions that go spectacularly punished over the course of the chapter. Perhaps the most elaborate example of such punishment is the following anecdote:

Mahumet second, se voulant deffaire de son frere, pour la jalousie de la domination, suivant le stile de leur race, y employa l’un de ses officiers, qui le suffoqua, l’engorgeant de quantité d’eau prinse trop à coup. Cela faict, il livra pour l’expiation de ce meurtre le meurtrier entre les mains de la mere du trepassé (car ils n’estoient freres que de pere); elle, en sa presence, ouvrit à ce meurtrier l’estomach, et, tout chaudement, de ses mains fouillant et arrachant son coeur, le jetta à manger aux chiens. (14)

Mohammed II punishes the instrument of his own action, identifying the crime with its execution rather than its design. It is not simply that he who agrees to participate in such a plan shares responsibility for it. Instead, he alone is spectacularly punished, as if the guilt were his alone—as if, in fact, he were a paragon of guilt. Although Montaigne’s neutral account of the event cannot be read as an endorsement of its gruesome conclusion, his repetition of the term “meurtrier” seems to affirm the calamitous responsibility borne by the instrument of the crime. Mohammed II’s officer really is a “meurtrier,” no matter how involuntary his participation, and thus Montaigne’s rhetoric confirms the officer’s guilt as he narrates his hideous death. He is disemboweled by his victim’s mother and his still-warm heart is fed to dogs. Having described the assassination as a “meurtre,” Montaigne’s repetition of the term “meurtrier” attaches the officer to the act in the reader’s mind, while Mohammed II is allowed to retain his proper name. In this light, the specificity of Montaigne’s own favored form of action comes into full relief. It is constituted by the actions of others—it conveys, refracts, or buffers them—but it cannot be confused with the mere execution of another’s design. On the other hand, as a form of openness to the actions of others, it cannot obviate the possibility of being rendered instrumental. To use the sensational language this passage makes available, one might say that Montaigne risks becoming just the kind of abject instrument that would merit disembowelment.

I have suggested that Montaigne’s disposition implies the affirmation of vulnerability. I have drawn attention not only to the risk of becoming another’s instrument, but also to the ambassador’s capacity to receive and transmit messages with violent consequences, and to the turbulent waters of the Lucretian image as evidence of the chapter’s atmosphere of ever-present peril. All the same, it would be easy, at this stage in the discussion, for the emphasis to have fallen most decisively on Montaigne’s interest in self-protection. Montaigne’s diplomatic strategy can easily be read as a form of defensive peacekeeping, and the status of the Lucretian image as a metaphor of emotional rather than material danger makes it easy to reject as evidence

of vulnerability. As the past several pages make clear, I disagree with these possible interpretations: I have shown the precariousness of the ambassador's position, and I have indicated the seriousness with which Montaigne describes emotional danger. Nonetheless, Montaigne's caution must be affirmed if his propensity for self-exposure is to be clearly understood.

There is an undeniable fear of violence in these pages, and an attention to human vulnerability that makes warfare seem increasingly odious. Writing is at times explicitly aligned with the project of keeping peace: "...Nous n'avons que faire de durcir nos courages par ces lames de fer," Montaigne writes, "c'est assez que nos espales le soyent; c'est assez de trampler nos plumes en ancre, sans les trampler en sang" (18). Here, Montaigne juxtaposes blood and ink, offering the reader a convenient either/or. He thus presents writing as an alternative to the waging of war. On the other hand, of course, writing is understood as a form of engagement—not the opposite of violence, exactly, but "assez"; as much as can be expected of us if we reject the Stoic imperative to "durcir nos courages." "De l'utile et de l'honneste" is a critique of violence, but its mode of critique makes violence impossible to rule out.

The best way to observe the limitlessness of Montaigne's vulnerability, which persists in spite of his fear of violence, is to examine his discussion of coerced promises, which promotes an extraordinarily flexible conception of selfhood. Montaigne imagines a scenario in which thieves extract a promise from him by threatening violence, and explains that he would keep that promise even after the threat of violence had passed. Montaigne writes:

Des voleurs vous ont prins; ils vous ont remis en liberté, ayant tiré de vous serment du paiement de certaine somme; on a tort de dire qu'un homme de bien sera quitte de sa foy sans payer, estant hors de leurs mains. Il n'en est rien. Ce que la crainte m'a faict une fois vouloir, je suis tenu à vouloir encore sans crainte; et quand elle n'aura forcé que ma langue sans volonté, encore suis je tenu de faire la maille bonne de ma parole. (16-17)

These reflections are especially forceful when juxtaposed with Montaigne's remark, a few lines later, that he would gladly abandon a promise on the grounds that it was cruel: "En cecy seulement a loy l'interest privé," he writes, "de nous excuser de faillir à nostre promesse, si nous avons promis chose meschante et inique de soy; car le droit de la vertu doit prevaloir le droit de nostre obligation" (17). Montaigne blithely revokes the promise he judges "meschante," but feels bound to the promise he makes his captors—with a knife to his throat, perhaps—to pay his own ransom upon his release. A coerced promise holds, but not a cruel one.

Without the argument I have been building for Montaigne's ethics of "nonchalance," these distinctions would be difficult to understand. Contextualized in this way, however, they actually follow logically from Montaigne's discussion. If, for Montaigne, the use of language holds a special place as a mode of ethical activity, and if the language of "nonchalance" is the extemporaneous language of the present moment, then the coerced promise integrates the chapter's central interests: ethical seriousness and highly contingent forms of speech. Verging on paradox, the chapter encourages the reader to take carelessness seriously—to be less careless about carelessness. The coerced promise is an emblem of the seriousness of the extemporaneous. Interpretive difficulty arises when the reader remembers that Montaigne, in the chapter's opening lines, explains that he leaves his casual blunders carelessly behind—which sounds almost like the opposite of the claim that he clings to a promise that was more the product of circumstance

than “volonté.” Yet both passages elevate the contingencies of the moment to a position of privilege—even when, in the former case, the purpose of that privilege is to explain away the author’s occasional silliness. In the episode of the thieves, a book of *Essais* that defines itself as living moment to moment pushes that project to the limit. The commitments of the moment cannot be revoked with an appeal to any overarching narrative, to any prior and perhaps longstanding condition, to any image of the self as standing before or beside the momentary.

In this way, the episode of the thieves presents the reader with one of the central paradoxes of “De l’utile et de l’honneste” and of Montaignian “nonchalance” in general. By placing a guarantee of temporal continuity (a promise) within the privileged space of the momentary, it asks the reader to imagine the intersection of the continuous and the discontinuous. Rhetorically, Montaigne’s interest gravitates toward discontinuity; the chapter is replete with observations like the following:

Ma liberté m’a aussi aisément deschargé du soubçon de faintise par sa vigueur, n’espargnant rien à dire pour poisant et cuisant qu’il fut, je n’eusse peu dire pis, absent, et qu’elle a une montre apparente de simplese et de nonchalance. Je ne pretens autre fruit en aggisant, que d’agir, et n’y attache longues suites et propositions; chasque action fait particulièrement son jeu: porte s’il peut!

Here, Montaigne explicitly links “nonchalance” with the disarticulation of an action from what precedes and follows it. “Simplese” encompasses both affect and activity, describing the casual performance of an action defined not by its consequences or motivations, but instead by the wayward commitment of the moment. In this way, the category of action itself seems to blur: to act without design or even a minimal evaluation of success or failure challenges conventional conceptions of action as the teleological expression of human potential.³⁵ The adverb that describes these actions is another Montaignian refrain: in Montaigne, “particulier” refers most often to something like privacy—a domain of personal, rather than public, experience. The action in question is not an entrance onto the stage of public events; it is an intimate and infinitely circumscribed absorption in the activity of the present moment. But because Montaigne—throughout this chapter, but most explicitly in the episode of the thieves—places emphasis on the power of promises, the delimitation of the moment does not create a zone of safe (because simple) immediacy or uncomplicated plenitude. On the contrary, Montaigne asks the reader to withdraw from the logic of causation and overarching narratives of action in favor of the infinitely narrowing space of the merely momentary, while simultaneously ensuring that this narrowing moment will be understood as conditioned by other moments and reciprocally conditioning them. A single moment is neither determined by nor unaffiliated with whatever precedes and follows it.

³⁵ James explains the Thomist conception of “active potentiality” as “the power of a thing to behave or develop in a way proper to it and according to its end” (50). According to this model, action belongs to its agent in an essential way (it is “proper to it”) and is constituted by its aim (its “end”).

III. “Le premier que je rencontre”: Montaigne’s Epistemology of Proximity

If “De l’utile et de l’honneste” presents a critique of the sort of ethics that relies on the rigid establishment of principle, “De l’experience” offers additional grounds for that critique. In this case, the careful regulation of the mind is understood as a predisposition for epistemological error. *Philosophical* rigor is no less a mode of violent insistence than any other kind, but it is also an occlusion of the inquisitive gaze. Recall Montaigne’s comparison, in the earlier chapter, of his own writing practice with offhanded conversation: “Je parle au papier comme je parle au premier que je rencontre,” he writes, picturing the page as the anonymous face of a passerby. In the later chapter, he adopts a similar language to picture an idealized mode of adjudication, bringing the ethical questions of the earlier chapter together with epistemological ones. After ridiculing a state of affairs in which regulation grows exponentially, trapping the population in a web of confusingly technical and overly rigid prohibitions, Montaigne writes,

Nature les donne [les loix] tousjours plus heureuses que ne sont celles que nous nous donnons. Tesmoing la peinture de l’aage doré des poëtes, et l’estat où nous voyons vivre les nations qui n’en ont point d’autres. En voylà qui, pour tous juges employent en leurs causes le premier passant qui voyage le long de leurs montaignes. (276)

For Montaigne, the simplicity and pliancy of natural judgment trump the complexity and severity of the legal code. The purveyor of unencumbered moral insight resembles Montaigne’s imagined interlocutor in the earlier chapter. “Le premier passant” is the most random of judges. Whoever happens by the scene of a legal dispute is immediately deemed its most suitable mediator. “Le premier passant” is a traveler, which means he knows nothing of the matter at hand, and he is a nobody, in the sense that he brings no special training or expertise to the case. This scenario extends the earlier chapter’s logic of “nonchalance.” The ethical solution to the conflict at hand is entrusted to someone who cannot have labored over it and for whom its outcome has little consequence. It is not by accident that Montaigne encrypts his name in his description of this anonymous, unmotivated, careless avatar of righteousness: “le premier passant qui voyage le long de leurs *montaignes*” (italics mine).

In this way, Montaigne’s distinctive criteria for ethical activity have become criteria for judicial evaluation. As this final chapter of the *Essais* moves toward its conclusion, a critique of legalistic thought gives way to the performance of an alternative. Against the rigors of any codified system, Montaigne presents a series of loosely connected reflections that derive from the idiosyncratic experience of daily life. From the very beginning, the *Essais* have been building toward this crescendo of firsthand observation. Among the most persistent of the collection’s interests is the deceptive nature of codified authority, be it that of Aristotle for the scholastics or, as in “De l’experience,” that of legal and medical doctrine. The example of the law usefully clarifies the interrelation of ethical and epistemological questions. Foolishly following the dictates of impersonal legal precepts encourages simultaneous ethical and epistemological failures. A court of law is one of the few places where being wrong (incorrect) almost always means being wrong (unethical), and the chapter attempts to synthesize ethics and epistemology. Beyond the heuristic clarity of the legal example, Montaigne suggests that the imposition of a system on the experience of thought, generally speaking, has an ethical dimension—or, more precisely, an *unethical* one. The emotional violence Montaigne subjects to critique in “De l’utile

et de l'honneste" is now aligned with stupidity. The foolish predetermination of answers to philosophical questions resembles the zealous insistence of the militant Christian (Catholic or Huguenot) on the doctrine of a particular church. For Montaigne, both positions are fundamentally tautological, repetitive acts of self-assertion that bespeak a failure to open oneself to the contingencies of experience.

In some ways, "De l'experience" simply extends the ethical argument of "De l'utile et de l'honneste," placing emphasis on the ethics of "nonchalance," irrespective of its epistemological consequences. Toward the end of the chapter, Montaigne offers descriptions of the carelessness and leisurely demeanor of ethically exemplary figures from antiquity. He suggests not only that "nonchalance" has its own, distinctive ethical value, but also that the "nonchalance" of these historical figures predisposes them for more traditional ethical behavior. He writes:

...parmy tant d'admirables actions de Scipion l'ayeul, personnage digne de l'opinion d'une origine celeste, il n'est rien qui luy donne plus de grace que de le voir nonchalamment et puerilement baguenaudant à amasser et choisir des coquilles, et jouer à cornichon-va-devant le long de la marine avec Laelius....
(321)

The description of Socrates which immediately follows clarifies that Montaigne's point is not simply that "nonchalance" is compatible with the inherent goodness implied by an "origine celeste," but more specifically that it encourages virtuous activity. Montaigne writes that Scipio's predilections for shell collecting and ball playing³⁶ are "admirable," but the reasons for his admiration remain unclear until he offers the following description of Socrates:

Ny chose plus remarquable en Socrates que ce que, tout vieil, il trouve le temps de se faire instruire à baller et jouer des instrumens, et le tient pour bien employé. Cettuy-cy s'est veu en ecstase, debout, un jour entier et une nuit, en presence de toute l'armée grecque, surpris et ravi par quelque profonde pensée. Il s'est veu, le premier parmy tant de vaillants hommes de l'armée, courir au secours d'Alcibiades accablé des ennemis, le couvrir de son corps et le descharer de la presse à vive force d'armes, et le premier emmy tout le peuple d'Athenes, outré comme luy d'un si indigne spectacle, se presenter à recourir Theramenes, que les trente tyrans faisoient mener à la mort par leurs satellites.... (321)

These lines indicate the elasticity of a careless disposition, which, notwithstanding Montaigne's examples of activities that seem to be *constituted* by "nonchalance" (successful diplomacy and his own brand of literary composition), can accommodate a wide range of behavior. Indeed, "nonchalance" can encourage activities that seem more likely to follow from courage, patriotism, anger, or other seemingly *motivating* passions. Here, dancing and musical instrument playing have taken the place of shell collecting and ball playing, and activities that might seem unrelated to these are examples of the very same disposition. First, there is Socrates's trance-like state. Meditative "ecstase" is as much an experience of "nonchalance" as the whimsical decision to take dance lessons. Second, Montaigne gives two examples of extraordinary valor, which derive not from martial values or military training but rather from this same mode of feeling.

³⁶ "Cornichon-va-devant" is similar to the better-known game of bocce.

“Nonchalance” predisposes Socrates to shield Alcibiades with his body and hasten to the aid of Theramenes. A life of leisurely playfulness and a careless engagement in modes of undisciplined, purposeless activity train the mind to respond with a certain ethical intensity to the experience of crisis.

As these examples demonstrate, Montaigne never delineates the distinction between specific forms of action that count as ethical and others that do not. Such a gesture would be anathema to the sort of openness Montaigne associates with “nonchalance.” Such openness is the ground for a critique of philosophical rigor. Systematic modes of thought predetermine the form an answer to a question will take, thereby closing the mind to anything other than the principles with which it begins. This is why the metaphor of the silkworm figures centrally in Montaigne’s famous commentary on the follies of over-interpretation. The silkworm shows that Montaigne’s critique is aimed at the solipsism of particular interpretive strategies. Montaigne questions the wisdom of endlessly working through the same set of givens—the wisdom of taking anything for granted, which is exactly what “given” means. The silkworm generates only an endless secretion, an extension of its own body; its work is simply to excrete itself indefinitely. “Les hommes mesconnoissent,” Montaigne writes, “la maladie naturelle de leur esprit: il ne faict que fureter et quester, et va sans cesse tournoiant, bastissant et s’emprestrant en sa besongne, comme nos vers de soye, et s’y estouffe. <<*Mus in pice.*>>” (278).³⁷ The silkworm-like interpreter remains trapped within the initial bounds of the investigation, grasping about in the space of the predetermined. Interpretation, conceived as the endless re-digestion of the given, is suicide by suffocation.

As an extension of the discussion of the law, the silkworm image suggests that the legal code is guilty of this same sort of solipsism: it establishes an immanent logic and spins out endless elaborations of it, but without the corrective influence of otherness—of whatever the system fails to presuppose. The law self-replicates rather than changing in the face of contingency.³⁸ Montaigne writes, “Or les loix se maintiennent en credit, non par ce qu’elles sont justes, mais par ce qu’elles sont loix. C’est le fondement mystique de leur autorité” (283). Recall Montaigne’s account of the motivation of those who foment civil war: “...ils attisent la guerre non par ce qu’elle est juste, mais par ce que c’est guerre” (9). His account of the law’s authority is an act of self-citation. The “fondement mystique” of legal “autorité” is tautology: the law is the law because it is the law. This is the logic of the warmonger: he wages war because it is war. In both cases, Montaigne specifies that the tautology in question excludes “just[ice].” There is an injustice in tautological self-replication, which manages to encompass a world it in some sense never touches. Montaigne offers the reader an example of the non-intersection of law and “just[ice]”—the failure of the legal mind to deviate from its habitual operations. Montaigne writes:

Des paysans viennent de m’advertir en haste qu’ils ont laissé presentement en une forest qui est à moy un homme meurtry de cent coups, qui respire encores et qui leur a demandé de l’eau par pitié et du secours pour le souslever. Disent qu’ils n’ont osé l’approcher et s’en sont fuis, de peur que les gens de la justice ne les y attrapassent, et, comme il se faict de ceux qu’on rencontre près d’un homme tué,

³⁷ The citation is from Erasmus (Frame 817).

³⁸ This suggestion resonates with classical and early modern conceptions of equity. For a concise account of the principle in both contexts, see Eden (“Legal”).

ils n'eussent à rendre compte de cet accident à leur total ruyne, n'ayant ny suffisance, ny argent, pour deffendre leur innocence. Que leur eussé-je dict? Il est certain que cet office d'humanité les eust mis en peine. (280-1)

Peasants discover a wounded man who begs them for water, but they flee the scene, fearing that they will be prosecuted for the assault. Contact with the body would make them suspects by default, and they lack the resources to defend themselves. Montaigne acknowledges the reasonableness of their reluctance to offer help: “certain” it is that contact with the law would only make them suffer. Montaigne’s language grants access to the habitual legal procedure that would ensure their victimization: “ceux qu’on rencontre près d’un homme tué” is the impersonal, generic label with which they would be tagged, were they to be found near the body. The actual circumstances of the victim’s predicament evaporate as legal machinery reconstitutes the scenario as a crime scene.

Faced with this debilitating solipsism, which is endemic to law, medicine, and textual commentary in general, Montaigne promotes a surprising alternative: the writing of the self. Such writing might appear paradigmatically solipsistic, but in fact it promises an engagement with exteriority. At first, Montaigne’s critique of interpretation seems to repeat a traditional opposition between origination and derivation,³⁹ but his account of the composition of the *Essais* undoes that opposition by picturing reflexivity as a disruption, rather than an extension, of selfhood. Montaigne writes:

Il y a plus affaire à interpreter les interpretations qu’à interpreter les choses, et plus de livres sur les livres que sur autres subject: nous ne faisons que nous entregloser. / Tout fourmille de commentaires; d’auteurs, il en est grand cherté. (279)

These words seem to favor “choses” over “livres,” the non-linguistic over the linguistic. However, Montaigne actually establishes an opposition between modes of writing—not between the mediated and the unmediated. He laments the supremacy of “commentaires” over the work of legitimate “auteurs,” writing about writing over writing about anything else. Even at this level, however, the opposition is deceptive. The object of Montaigne’s critique is tautology: any writing project that sets out to “interpreter les interpretations” conceives of itself as a mode of replication. Tautology is a symptom of authority: one produces “commentaire” rather than assuming the mantle of “auteur” by presupposing the special knowledge of one’s predecessors. Montaigne does not wish to contrast language with non-language; writing is only *about* writing in this pejorative sense when its purpose is simply to explicate another text. Writing that deals with other pieces of writing but is not devoted to fortifying their authority is not so much about writing as simply intertextual. This last point comes into focus a few lines later, where Montaigne rebukes Aristotle and his imitators:

Combien souvent, et sottement à l’avanture, ay-je estandu mon livre à parler de soy? Sottement; quand ce ne seroit que pour cette raison qu’il me devoit souvenir de ce que je dy des autres qui en font de mesmes: <<Que ces oeillades si frequentes à leur ouvrage tesmoignent que le coeur leur frissonne de son amour, et

³⁹ See Quint (“Origin”) for more on this problematic.

les rudoyements mesmes desdaigneus, dequoy ils le battent, que ce ne sont que mignardises et affetteries d'une faveur maternelle>>, suivant Aristote, à qui et se priser et se mespriser naissent souvent de pareil air d'arrogance. Car mon excuse, que je doy avoir en cela plus de liberté que les autres, d'autant qu'à point nommé j'escry de moy et de mes escrits comme de mes autres actions, que mon theme se renverse en soy, je ne sçay si chacun la prendra. (279-80)

Montaigne suggests that writers return to their own work with a certain “arrogance,” taking pleasure in the offspring of their minds, even when they seem to be pointing out errors or revising their previous thinking. Again, the problem with “commentaires” is their power to *authorize*: whether one glosses the work of another writer or returns fondly to one’s own work, one imbues the writing in question with authority. As in the examples of “la guerre” and “les loix,” tautology signals an assumption of power that permits the continual replication of the same. In contrast, Montaigne explains his own writing practice under the sign of weakness: he avows guilt of self-satisfaction and describes the extension of the *Essais* as sheer stupidity (he extends them “sottement”). More importantly, Montaigne’s self-commentary is not a consequence of the inflation of the writing self, since the self in question is more the object than the subject of the act of writing. The writing self weakens and loses its solidity as it submits itself to an account of the activities of the written self. It is in this sense that Montaigne’s theme “se renverse en soy,” losing any capacity to point beyond itself to a source of authority, exposing itself to the otherness of its own experiences.

In this way, the chapter offers a critique of systematic thought, where *systematic* designates the reconstitution of present contingencies in the mold of past imperatives. An awareness of the violence of the systematic, however, does not amount to blanket disapproval. Montaigne skeptically affirms the virtues of the systematic, while presenting his own epistemology as unconstrained by its rigors—and undecieved by the reification of the given. Montaigne describes the value of his project with characteristic modesty, acknowledging the benefits of other forms of knowledge production. He is alert to the specific obstacles of the systematic—in particular, the authority it attributes to its own canons and premises—but he never suggests that his own procedures are unencumbered. On the contrary, he places emphasis on the weakness of his mode of observation—but it is this acceptance of weakness that grants access to a world that is always stranger than any fixed premises would allow. Montaigne writes:

Les sçavans partent et denotent leurs fantasies plus specifiquement, et par le menu. Moy, qui n’y voy qu’autant que l’usage m’en informe, sans regle, presente generalement les miennes, et à tastons. Comme en cecy: je prononce ma sentence par articles descousus, ainsi que de chose qui ne se peut dire à la fois et en bloc. La relation et la conformité ne se trouvent point en telles ames que les nostres, basses et communes. La sagesse est un bastiment solide et entier, dont chaque piece tient son rang et porte sa marque: <<*Sola sapientia in se tota conversa est.*>>⁴⁰ Je laisse aux artistes, et ne sçay s’ils en viennent à bout en chose si meslée, si menue et fortuite, de renger en bandes cette infinie diversité de visages, et arrester nostre inconstance et la mettre par ordre. Non seulement je trouve mal-aisé d’attacher nos actions les unes aux autres, mais chacune à part soy je trouve

⁴⁰ The line is from Cicero.

mal-aysé de la designer proprement par quelque qualité principale, tant elles sont doubles et bigarrées à divers lustres. (287)

Montaigne's observations proceed "sans regle"—this is their chief virtue—but they are impinged upon from many directions. Montaigne's perspective is shaped by mere custom ("l'usage"), which belongs as much to the realm of the given as any philosophical premise (though the banality and inconstancy of custom diminish its authority). He admits that he describes his experiences loosely rather than precisely ("generalement" rather than "specifiquement"). He speaks with diffidence, presenting his observations as provisional and exploratory (interestingly, for my purposes, "experimentally" is Charles Cotton's translation of "à tastons") (Cotton 267). Were the haziness of these impressions not sufficiently disparaging, Montaigne cautions the reader that they are also fragmentary and scattered, conveyed by a disjointed language ("par articles descousus") without any organizing principle ("la relation et la conformité" are nowhere to be found). Montaigne's modesty is not feigned; this account really does correspond to the form of the *Essais*.

But the virtues of so pitiful a method (or non-method) are taken seriously. Montaigne proposes an extreme anti-essentialism *avant la lettre*, arguing that "nos actions" not only fail to fit together with one another, but that even a single action, taken in isolation, cannot be accurately named by any principal quality ("par quelque qualité principale"), because everything is "doubles et bigarrées à divers lustres." The final phrase intensifies the reader's experience of fragmentation, beginning with the simplest conception of ambiguity as mere doubleness, before doubling this description itself by adding an adjectival phrase that conveys a hyperbolic diversification. Montaigne takes a word that—on its own, without qualification—conveys chromatic diversity ("bigarrées"), but then specifies that polychromatic variety diversifies the quality of its light ("à divers lustres").

Because one can assume that any multi-colored field contains myriad gradations of light, Montaigne's description seems tautological. Interestingly, however, it is an anti-tautological tautology. Against the mechanical repetitions of the scholastics, Montaigne's repetition generates descriptive abundance, gradually transforming a seemingly unified action into a field of shimmering colors. Characteristically, Montaigne leaves it to others to accomplish the task he refuses. Without any cutting irony that would delegitimize a more systematic epistemology, Montaigne displays unambiguous skepticism about the possibility of its success: there is something willful and absurd about the attempt to "renger en bandes cette infinie diversité de visages." It is hard to imagine any organizational scheme that would seem adequate to an infinite diversity of faces.⁴¹ The latter image conveys extreme variety—evoking the human face, which is habitually studied for subtle alterations of expression, and then multiplying that face an infinite number of times. Even the line from Cicero is quoted in a context that renders it parodic: "*Sola sapientia in se tota conversa est*" recalls the self-suffocation of the silkworm. Montaigne

⁴¹ Hence Foucault's famous "shatter[ing]" laughter at the opening of *The Order of Things*, where he discusses Borges's description of a "certain Chinese encyclopedia" in which "animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies" (xv). What generates laughter for Foucault only raises Montaigne's eyebrow.

indicates that the raw materials of his experience might one day occupy a taxonomy, but does not withhold his skepticism that such a taxonomy could do it justice.

It is important to emphasize that Montaigne's freedom from taxonomy cannot be confused with a dream of total freedom. As the foregoing analysis suggests, his observations are messy, disconnected, and tainted by common sense. Even when he is more direct about the virtues of his approach, he ensures that the reader knows exactly what sort of virtues these are. Montaigne writes:

En fin, tout cette fricassée que je barbouille icy n'est qu'un registre des essais de ma vie, qui est, pour l'interne santé, exemplaire assez, à prendre l'instruction à contrepoil. Mais quant à la santé corporelle, personne ne peut fournir d'expérience plus utile que moy, qui la presente pure, nullement corrompue et alterée par art et par opinion. (289)

Montaigne claims epistemological purity when it comes to the field of medicine, but this purity derives specifically from the exclusion of "art" and "opinion." Montaigne's medical knowledge does not display the absolute accuracy of unmediated observation; it simply retains qualities that would be effaced by the laborious artfulness of philosophical presentation or the imposition of established opinion. Indeed, Montaigne's "experience," no matter how "pure," remains a fricassée—a disordered stew of judgments—and is only "exemplary enough" ("exemplaire assez," italics mine) rather than paradigmatic. No one can offer a better account of bodily health than Montaigne *not* because he is an authority on the matter but for exactly the opposite reason: authority has nothing to offer a realm of knowledge that pertains to the bodies everyone inhabits. Free from the blinders of medical doctrine, everyone gives the best account of his or her own corporeal experience. Without suggesting the absolute authority of the firsthand account, Montaigne promotes the sort of casual, unlabored presentation of knowledge it represents as an alternative to the tortured formality of natural philosophy.

In this way, "De l'expérience" proposes a freedom from the systematic, but it also follows the example of "De l'utile et de l'honneste" by blurring the distinction between the oppositions such a proposition implies. Indeed, it resembles the earlier chapter by repeating and blurring the very same set of oppositions. Both chapters require a refined sense of the interrelation of the pairs freedom/discipline and momentary/continuous. The episode of the thieves in the earlier chapter demonstrates the openness of the momentary to the establishment of continuity through the making of promises—that is, the way the radical freedom of the absolutely momentary grants access even to its seeming opposite, the discipline enforced by a solemn oath.⁴² Where the earlier chapter presents the episode of the thieves as an emblem of the interrelation of both pairs, the later chapter meditates on each of them at length.

A freedom from the systematic suggests an opposition between, on the one hand, freedom, casualness, and contingency, and, on the other hand, discipline, formality, and principle. Montaigne's discussion of "delicatesse" indicates the deceptiveness of such a conflict. After Montaigne begins to describe his habits and inclinations, he presents the following pair of unmistakably contrary claims, one coming just a few lines after the other:

⁴² See Derrida ("Rogues") for a discussion of a similar sort of hospitality to the inimical in the figure of "autoimmunity," which is a consistent preoccupation throughout his late works.

La plus contraire qualité à un honneste homme, c'est la delicatesses et obligation à certaine façon particulière; et elle est particulière si elle n'est plioable et souple. Il y a de la honte de laisser à faire par impuissance ou de n'oser ce qu'on voit faire à ses compaignons.

Quoy que j'aye esté dressé autant qu'on a peu à la liberté et à l'indifference, si est-ce que par nonchalance, m'estant en vieillissant plus arresté sur certaines formes (mon age est hors d'institution et n'a desormais dequoy regarder ailleurs que à se maintenir), la coustume a desjà, sans y penser, imprimé si bien en moy son caractere en certaines choses, que j'appelle excez de m'en despartir. (294)

In the first passage, Montaigne repeats his frequent assertion that pliancy is preferable to insistence. Here, the intransigence of “delicatesses” is an affront to good fellowship: if a “façon particulière”—a private habit—is not flexible enough to adapt to the norm of a social engagement, it becomes a shameful failure to accept hospitality. A few lines later, however, Montaigne admits that he has settled firmly upon certain habits, in spite of an education in “liberté” and “indifference” that should have precluded such fastidiousness. This is not a casual admission to imperfection. At this point in the chapter, Montaigne begins to list his finicky habits, revealing just how fussy he is about his daily routine: he refuses to sleep during the daytime; he refuses to eat between meals; and so on. The contradiction is clear: he generally dislikes “delicatesses,” but he remains resolute about his own delicacy. Montaigne’s juxtaposition of “indifference” and “nonchalance” helps explain the logic of the reversal. Though his “indifference” should have precluded an attachment to habit, it is “par nonchalance” that he ends up settling upon certain habitual tendencies. Such is the paradoxical structure of “nonchalance”: a carelessness *about carelessness itself* means that carelessness is never sternly enforced. Montaigne’s indifference is, among other things, an indifference *to indifference*, which means that it permits a casual habituation to certain fixed ways of living. “Nonchalance” is not a hermetic container that protects the self from obstinacy; because it is constituted by a radical openness, it has to accommodate even an obstinate insistence on habit. By resisting rules for living, “nonchalance” occasionally capitulates to them.

Montaigne extends this line of reasoning several pages later, describing his childhood eating habits. Here, his central concern is the “delicatesses” of guarding against “delicatesses”: when “nonchalance” becomes a discipline, it stops being “nonchalance.” Montaigne writes:

On a eu en mon enfance principalement à corriger le refus que je faisois des choses que communement on ayme le mieux en cet age: sucres, confitures, pieces de four. Mon gouverneur combatit cette hayne de viandes delicates comme une espece de delicatesses. Aussi n'est elle autre chose que difficulté de goust, où qu'il s'applique. Qui oste à un enfant certaine particuliere et obstinée affection au pain bis et au lart, ou à l'ail, il luy oste la friandise. Il en est qui font les laborieux et les patiens pour regretter le boeuf et le jambon parmy les perdris. Ils ont bon temps: c'est la delicatesses de delicats; c'est le goust d'une molle fortune qui s'affadit aux choses ordinaires et accoustumées.... (310-11)

As a child, Montaigne disliked refined confections, preferring plainer foods. His tutor rightly discouraged this rejection of “viandes delicates” because such aversion to elegant treats was

itself “une espece de delicatessen.” Even an intuitive aversion to sophisticated eating threatens to become a sort of fixation. In this way, Montaigne makes explicit the self-reflexive problem of “delicatessen” about “delicatessen.” He segues seamlessly from a child’s relatively unreflective predilection for simple foods to an adult’s affected preference for the same, suggesting that both amount to the same “delicatessen de delicats.” The comparison sets motivation aside—it does not matter whether obstinacy is intuitive or pretentiously put on—and isolates inflexibility in its most general form. Montaigne cautions against falling prey to any and every refusal to adapt—including the refusal to resemble the inflexible (by enjoying the cuisine of the fussily particular). In order to seem unparticular in their tastes, Montaigne’s affected diners reject the cuisine of the most demanding gourmards, but this display of flexibility is itself a failure of flexibility. Montaignian flexibility means enjoying as laboriously prepared and elaborate a dish as dressed pheasant, even though this means taking on the appearance of the most spoiled, extravagant gourmand. Montaigne’s diction provides a metaphorical illustration of the problem of excesses of “nonchalance.” “Affadir” suggests a reduction of all foods to flavorlessness, and though it applies explicitly to those who reject “choses ordinaires,” only a semicolon separates it from Montaigne’s critique of those who reject *choses extraordinaires*. This is a refinement of “nonchalance,” specifying that such a tendency is not a rigid discipline that squeezes the world dry of its distinctive qualities, but a freedom to savor those qualities in all their diversity, including the flavor of rigid discipline itself (the kind that trains the tongue for sophisticated flavors).

Like “De l’utile et de l’honneste,” “De l’experience” suggests that such an experience of freedom—one so complete it includes its opposite—has a temporal component. While the episode of the thieves in “De l’utile et de l’honneste” shows how even the absolutely momentary interacts with other moments (through, for instance, the making of promises), Montaigne’s account of distraction in “De l’experience” shows the internal division of the absolutely momentary. Self-contained experiences seem to be housed within other self-contained experiences—proof that a single moment is not only an extension of other moments but also, in itself, *more than one moment*. In this way, Montaigne asks the reader to reevaluate the meaning of the momentary. The Montaignian moment cannot simply be inhabited, to the exclusion of other moments. On the contrary, it is a gesture of infinite but unrealizable delimitation—an infinitely narrowing focus on the present and proximate which never definitively excludes the absent and remote. As the ambit of observation decreases, the sensitivity of observation increases.

Montaigne favors an ability to be present in one’s body over a persistent attention to something beyond oneself, but, even in the midst of his defense of self-presence, he describes himself as absent from himself. Montaigne disparages those who devalue the banal, material comforts of the everyday—“plaisirs corporels”—because they are preoccupied instead with some putatively transcendent issue (319). “Je hay,” Montaigne writes, “qu’on nous ordonne d’avoir l’esprit aus nues, pendant que nous avons le corps à table” (319). But the account of self-presence that follows actually divides the self in such a way that presence itself seems to fragment. Montaigne writes:

Quand je dance, je dance; quand je dors, je dors; voyre et quand je me promeine solitairement en un beau vergier, si mes pensées se sont entretenues des occurences estrangieres quelque partie du temps, quelque autre partie je les rameine à la promenade, au vergier, à la douceur de cette solitude et à moy. (319)

The passage places value in the occupation of one's present activity—the ability to remain engaged in one's experience. Montaigne gives hyperbolic form to this ability, deploying tautology as a figure of self-identity. But the sequence of tautologies builds toward a disruption of the self-presence it describes, suggesting that the tautologies themselves are not tautological: instead, self-presence is the ability to be present to one's own absence. Montaigne might have brought the sequence to a conclusion with a climactically complex tautology: *Quand je me promeine solitairement en un beau vergier, je me promeine solitairement en un beau vergier*. Instead, the expected tautology unfolds into an admission that the solitary walker's "pensées" depart and return, giving the experience of presence a certain rhythm of differentiation. Indeed, the experience of being present to oneself is conferred by that experience of difference: the "douceur" of "solitude" with oneself is experienced as the return of one's thoughts from an elsewhere. This does not mean that Montaigne abandons his advocacy for an absorption in the momentary and an attention to the proximate. Rather, it implies that such an experience is also an experience of absence. One successfully occupies the present when one is *unconcerned*—with, above all else, whatever subject matter has been granted authority by tradition. When the "esprit" is "aus nues," one has abandoned the present for the authority of past philosophical judgments. When one narrows one's attention to the present experience of, say, walking in an orchard, that experience includes any number of "occurrences estrangieres"—but these are not appeals to the authority of one's predecessors. They are simply the distractions of the moment.

The mind occupies at least two places at once, but it is the experience of the "at once" that reveals the interplay of presence and absence that constitutes self-awareness. The experience of the freedom of the self is an experience of not being oneself. This point holds true for the body as well as for the mind; indeed, Montaigne's account of attending the Catholic liturgy suggests that body and mind are one—but even so, in accordance with the internal differentiation of presence, more than one. Perhaps it would be best to say that body and mind are more than two. (The line immediately preceding the passage on the liturgy makes this issue explicit: "Mon marcher est prompt et ferme; et ne sçay lequel des deux, ou l'esprit ou le corps, ay arresté plus malaisément en mesme point" [317]. Montaigne writes:

Le prescheur est bien de mes amys, qui oblige mon attention tout un sermon. Aux lieux de ceremonie, où chacun est si bandé en contenance, où j'ay veu les dames tenir leurs yeux mesme si certains, je ne suis jamais venu à bout que quelque piece des miennes n'extravague tousjours; encore que j'y sois assis, j'y suis peu rassis. Comme la chambriere du philosophe Chrysippus disoit de son maistre qu'il n'estoit yvre que par les jambes (car il avoit cette coustume de les remuer en quelque assiete qu'il fust, et elle le disoit lors que le vin esmouvant les autres, luy n'en sentoit aucune alteration), on a peu dire aussi dès mon enfance que j'avois de la follie aux pieds, ou de l'argent vif, tant j'y ay de remuement et d'inconstance en quelque lieu que je les place. (317)

Montaigne describes the disarticulation of the self in the experience of paying attention—or of *trying* to pay attention, though Montaigne's account suggests there may be no difference between the effort and the accomplishment. He explains that only an exceptional "prescheur" can hold his "attention," leaving open the question of whether such a "prescheur" could actually be found. Picturing attentiveness as an exertion of the body, he distinguishes between the fixed gaze of "les

dames” during the liturgy and his own experience of losing a part of himself in its midst. Montaigne’s vocabulary is intriguingly vague: “quelque piece” departs the attentive body, so that it remains both seated and unseated, attentive and distracted. The passage presents a sequence of increasingly wayward corporeal exertions: from (1) fixed eyes (“yeux...certains”) to (2) unspecified, wandering parts, perhaps both mental and corporeal (“quelque piece...[qui] extravague...”) to (3) drunken legs (“yvre...par les jambes”) to (4) crazy feet (“la follie aux pieds”). Montaigne describes his feet as vessels of mercury (“argent vif”), and this metal appears earlier in the chapter as a figure for the formlessness of contingent experience. In Montaigne’s opening critique of the rigidity of law, he writes, “Qui a veu des enfans essayans de renfermer à certain nombre une masse d’argent-vif: plus ils le pressent et pestrissent et s’estudient à le contraindre à leur loy, plus ils irritent la liberté de ce genereux metal: il fuit à leur art et se va menuisant et esparpillant au delà de tout compte” (277). The imposition of any discipline—be it the authority of the law or the formal stiffness required by participation in the liturgy—fails to correspond to the formless pliability of contingent experience. The more the children attempt to control the piece of mercury, the more it subdivides and eludes their grasp. The more Montaigne quiets his body and mind in the space of ritual, the more they rebel.

This phenomenon clarifies what I mean by disarticulation: Montaigne is continually concerned with a narrowing of focus that isolates a constituent part of an aggregated experience. Individual parts separate from the aggregates they comprise, but those parts are subject to the same internal decomposition. Montaigne’s discussion of his withdrawal from overarching narratives and authoritative schemes for interpretation into the space of the proximate and present *is always also* a discussion of the further subdivision of that delimited space. Thus his inductive account of the knowledge he gleans from anecdotal experience *is always also* an account of the strange disintegration of the anecdote, so that what seems most “particulier” and self-evident also seems less “particulier” and self-evident than it might be. One indication of this tendency is Montaigne’s predilection for the locution “à part.” One of the chapter’s main interests is the isolation implied by that expression: a narrowing of the topic of discussion that never rests easy in a sufficiently isolated realm. There are too many examples⁴³ of the expression for me to discuss them all, but a couple illustrations will indicate the general effect. I have already quoted one of them. Recall the following remark on the non-philosophical character of Montaigne’s reflections: “Non seulement je trouve mal-aisé d’attacher nos actions les unes aux autres, mais chacune à part soy je trouve mal-aysé de la designer proprement par quelque qualité principale, tant elles sont doubles et bigarrées à divers lustres” (287). Montaigne narrows the discussion from a linear narrative of sequenced “actions” to a single action taken “à part,” before indicating that even a single action could be segmented into myriad “lustres.” This is the signature gesture: a redoubled narrowing that implies a *mise-en-abyme*.

Another good example, because it contributes to my account of Montaignian distraction, concerns his intolerance for noise. Many people, he explains, are accustomed to a persistent noise that does not distract them from their work.⁴⁴ Montaigne, for his part, has not the slightest tolerance for it: “Je suis bien au contraire,” he writes. “...j’ay l’esprit tendre et facile à prendre l’essor; quand il est empesché à part soy, le moindre bourdonnement de mouche l’assassine” (293). “À part soy” describes the mind in absorption, an isolation of the mind from the surrounding environment that can be destroyed by the slightest buzzing of a fly. Yet Montaigne,

⁴³ See, for example, pp. 285, 287, 293, 305, 323.

⁴⁴ “White noise” *avant la lettre*.

in his account of the church service, goes on to describe absorption as an experience of distraction. It is not only that the isolation of the mind in absorption is easily violated; it is also that absorption itself fissures the mind and body into separate functions and activities.

In each case, the point is not that the isolation of an activity can only be illusory (though this is true of absolute isolation), but that the act of isolation is a bid for freedom. Montaigne's interest is the movement of disarticulation, rather than the discovery of a "qualité principale" that would not be subject to further analysis and reduction. In its entirety, the chapter pits liberatory disintegration against authoritarian conglomeration, exploring the ethical advantages of floating free from rigid contexts that would seem to compel particular forms of action. Perhaps the best emblem of this thematic emphasis is the following:

Je prens plaisir de voir un general d'armée au pied d'une breche qu'il veut tantost
attaquer, se prestant tout entier et delivre à son disner, son devis, entre ses amys....
C'est aux petites ames, ensevelies du pois des affaires, de ne s'en sçavoir
purement desmesler, de ne les sçavoir et laisser et reprendre.... (320).

As a species of emotional pacifism, it is fitting that Montaigne imagines this ability to separate oneself from context as a general's decision to take a recess from the battlefield, to remove himself from a narrative that will soon unfold into yet another violent conflict, and instead take pleasure in the company of his friends. This is another example of the subtlety of Montaigne's ethics: it accommodates actions it would seem to preclude. Though it is hardly insignificant that Montaigne chooses the momentary recess from violence as an example, the narrative implied by that recess points to the eventual resumption of war.

IV. "Good in Itself Simply": Bacon and Montaigne's *Pas de Deux*

As I discuss in the introduction to this chapter, Horkheimer and Adorno are only a single example of a long tradition of interpretation that sees Bacon's contribution to natural philosophy as (1) the identification of knowledge with power, in the sense that knowledge becomes the requisite know-how for the manipulation of the natural world; and (2) the introduction of forward-marching progress as the *raison d'être* of scientific inquiry and technological innovation. In this final section of the chapter, I dispute the standard interpretation of Bacon by showing how Montaignian he is. On the one hand, Bacon systematizes Montaigne's "nonchalance" by placing it in the service of progress. On the other hand, because "nonchalance" is nothing other than an escape from system, its enlistment by the systematic can have no other consequence than the distortion of the systematic. For this reason, the system that ensures the progress of natural philosophy is not a system and its consequences are not progressive—at least not as those terms are ordinarily used. This, then, is the advantage of restoring Montaignian emotion to its central place in Bacon's natural philosophy: the conception of "progress" for which Bacon and his early modern successors are famous is nothing like the "progress" of the Enlightenment and its liberal progeny, though these have been conflated by modern scholars, detractors and apologists alike. The central purpose of this chapter is to offer a detailed account of how this alternate conception of progress took shape. Such an account is only possible through the juxtaposition of Montaigne's account of "nonchalance" and Bacon's description of the natural philosopher's affect.

Bacon recognizes the epistemological advantages of Montaigne's casual indifference, which, as I have explained, is an experience of freedom from the authoritative pronouncements of the past, and, on the basis of such indifference, he elaborates a theory of natural philosophical inquiry that escapes the logic of chronology. Aware of the waywardness of such an approach, Bacon insists on the eventual imposition of order on the experimental observer's wild findings. Most scholars, eager to see in Bacon a champion of triumphant progress (in its distinctively modern incarnation), overlook the unruliness of what Bacon calls "learning." On the rare occasion that it captures their attention, they place undue emphasis on the enlistment of observation in the forward march of scientific discovery. But privilege can be granted to either side of the opposition between waywardness and orderliness: even those scholars who notice the lawlessness of observation suggest that it is eventually disciplined by the systematic pursuit of progress; it is just as easy to conclude, as I do here, that progress is rendered wayward by the lawless observations that make it possible. I suggest that Bacon takes the latter view, and that he signals the status of his dream of teleological advancement as a speculative alibi for the inherent lawlessness of his proposals by marking it as a flight of wayward fancy. Bacon's progress is not a straight line that connects past, present, and future. Instead, it is a single step forward within the space of the moment, a step outside the tautological circle in which past pronouncements are borne out by present observations. It can thus only be understood as a step *forward* in the narrow sense that it moves beyond the authority of past speculation. "Progress" is a single, sauntering step—and the sound of this casual footfall is the death knell of every foregone conclusion.

My account of "nonchalance" and its central place in the *Advancement* should ameliorate some of the frustrations of Bacon scholarship. For example, it is commonplace to lament the "failure" of Bacon's inquiries in natural philosophy. "The closer we look at Bacon's performance as a scientist," Brian Vickers writes, "the more disappointed we become" (3). Vickers never qualifies this dismal verdict, defending Bacon only on the narrow ground that the literary qualities of his prose merit scholarly attention. "If we can no longer estimate Bacon the scientist very highly," Vickers explains, "justice has certainly yet to be done to him as a writer" (3). I would counter these judgments with the suggestion that Bacon is neither a "scientist" nor a "writer" in the modern senses of those terms, that his work has to be judged as a feat of natural philosophy from which "writing" is inextricable (though not in a neatly "literary" sense), and that Vickers' "disappoint[ment]" says more about his expectations (and those of teleologically-minded historians of science) than it does about Bacon's achievements.

Vickers' interpretation, like Horkheimer and Adorno's equally teleological one, has a surprising tenacity. Even James Stephens, a critic who focuses on the link between "style" and "science," persists in viewing Bacon as a failure. "The failure of [Bacon's] own philosophy," he writes, "and especially its incompleteness, for example, is explained by the fact that he has no particular philosophy...and sees himself as a 'wit' with skills of recording which will make the first steps to a new philosophy easier to take than they might have been" (vii). Stephens is insightful in his attention to Bacon's predilection for "first steps," but he does not push this insight far enough. The task Bacon assigns himself is emphatically *preliminary*, but scholars have taken this in the most literal sense, concluding that Bacon fails to make good on his promise. This is all wrong: Bacon's work is not prefatory in the sense that every philosophical project has an introductory phase; he theorizes, elaborates, and defends a mode of cognition that is *always and inherently preliminary*, that is nothing other than a freedom from the firm establishment of premises. Stephens generously suggests that Bacon failed to figure out anything of scientific value because he rested content with his own capacity to lay the groundwork for a

new natural philosophy and left the task of discovery to future researchers.⁴⁵ Reading Bacon together with Montaigne, it behooves me to redouble this generosity—to argue, on the contrary, that Bacon’s achievement is exactly this reluctance to participate in the construction project to which he pays lip service. The aspiration to build a new, totalizing philosophy is itself only the moral buttress of Bacon’s most decisive innovation: a theory of emotion that makes discovery possible on the basis of the abandonment of every philosophical presupposition. Bacon never strolls through the edifice of “modern science” because his *pas de deux* with Montaigne is only a single *pas*. Together with Montaigne, Bacon focuses the attention of natural philosophy on a single moment of observation: a present tense in which the blinders of philosophical authority fall away and creation reveals its myriad forms.

Because my argument hinges on the way early modern natural philosophy configures emotional experience, I have drawn on the work of Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, whose *Wonders and the Order of Nature* pioneered the interweaving of the history of science and the history of the passions. Daston and Park’s book, which traces the historical path of wonder from the Middle Ages through the Enlightenment and beyond, remains the most ambitious and persuasive example of this interdisciplinary approach.⁴⁶ Bacon has a central place in their account, since Baconian science is the only discourse that brings the study of marvels to the center of natural philosophy—after a long history of marginalization, and before the Enlightenment’s renewed commitment to the “anti-marvelous.” Daston and Park come closer than anyone else to noticing and naming the experience of “nonchalance” around which experimental science took shape. For Bacon, they explain, “the rhythms of curiosity were those of addiction or of consumption for its own sake, cut loose from need and satisfaction” (307). This sensitivity to the importance of “curiosity” without “need and satisfaction” draws them close to the discovery of the casual indifference at the heart of Bacon’s enterprise.

However, the difficulty of theorizing a mode of indifference that is neither Stoic repression nor inhuman affectlessness prevents Daston and Park from exploring the complexity of Bacon’s muted intensity. It is especially telling that, for Daston and Park, the rejection of “need and satisfaction” suggests “addiction,” which is, in fact, an intensification of “need and satisfaction”—an apotheosis of “need” that requires constant, continual “satisfaction.” In the context of their argument, this comes as no surprise, since they tend to describe indifference as repression. “To be a member of a modern elite,” they write in their epilogue, “is to regard wonder and wonders with studied indifference; enlightenment is still in part defined as the anti-marvelous. But deep inside, beneath tasteful and respectable exteriors, we still crave wonders” (368). Deep down, they suggest, people *really are* impassioned observers of the world, and it is

⁴⁵ Vickers’ position is similar. In his account of Bacon’s use of the aphorism, he writes, “Bacon was quite sure that systems could ultimately be devised for representing and even dominating reality (and spent most of his life designing them), only insisting that the aphorism be used for the crucial preliminary stages where truth must be allowed to grow” (“Renaissance Prose” 80). The incompatibility between Bacon’s Montaignian philosophy and modern assumptions about the purposes of science is never more evident than in Vickers’s serene confidence that Bacon’s project is ultimately about the construction of systems. Vickers notices that Bacon favors the aphorism because of “its flexibility and freedom from system,” but, like Stephens, assumes that this “freedom from system” is temporary and will soon give way to its renewed construction.

⁴⁶ Daston’s independent writings are similarly instructive. See especially “Baconian Facts” and “Preternatural Philosophy.”

only through repressive cultivation that they have rendered themselves indifferent—or faux-indifferent. One of the basic assumptions of my project, however, is that indifference does not have to be “studied,” and that experiences of “nonchalance” might come as a matter of course. For Bacon, it is exactly that sort of casual indifference that permits an escape from the constraints of scholastic orthodoxy.

Daston and Park also fail to attend to the complex temporality of Baconian feeling; as my interpretation of Montaigne suggests, the epistemology of indifference reconfigures time. To abandon “need and satisfaction” is to float away from a linear conception of temporality: “need” establishes a specific future that is subsequently confirmed by “satisfaction,” meaning that different moments of experience can be linked by a straight line. Montaigne’s signature gesture is to disarticulate the present moment from everything that precedes and follows—and Bacon follows him in this. Daston and Park tend to describe the emotional experience of the new science as (1) a simple, narrativized sequence leading to the discovery of new facts; or (2) an unfeeling, timeless encounter with the absolute. They offer, for example, the following description of experimental emotion: “Musing admiration, startled wonder, then bustling curiosity—these were the successive moments of seventeenth-century clichés describing how the passions impelled and guided natural philosophical investigations” (303). There is certainly evidence of all these states of feeling in experimentalist literature, but such a sequencing of “clichés” (and this is the right word for them) fails to do justice to the capacious, time-bending experience of “musing admiration”—what I, following Montaigne, have been calling “nonchalance.” Indeed, emotion is never so neatly ordered in Bacon’s *Advancement*—even if much else is. Daston and Park continually refer to wonder as a “bait for curiosity”—or, in the case of Robert Hooke, as a “reward,” since in Hooke’s *Micrographia* (1665) wonder is the pleasure one derives from the moment of discovery itself rather than the original motivation for investigation (323). In all of these cases, the natural philosopher is goaded toward investigation and receives emotional compensation for his pains. In Bacon, Montaigne, and their successors, however, what matters most is the abandonment of narrative sequencing, which is concomitant with an absorption in the momentary.

In an earlier article on Baconian science, Daston writes in a different vein of Descartes’s “passionless passion” (58). Here, experimental emotion looks timeless and impersonal: “Only when we wonder,” she writes, “are we emotionally at rest, unperturbed by pounding heart or rushing blood, in the grip of a cool, purely intellectual passion” (58). This seems apt for Descartes (though he offers some remarks on “nonchalance” in *Les passions de l’âme* [1649] that would not be consistent with such a reading), but it fails to explain Bacon’s *Advancement*. Daston’s description suggests a counterfeit passion—an experience of intellect disguised as passion. It also suggests a total stasis that excludes flexibility along with even a soupçon of actual emotion. For Bacon, however, the experience of “learning” is one of calm gratification and epistemological flexibility, gradations of emotion and waywardness of intellect.

Bacon’s most direct attempt to theorize casual indifference derives, like Montaigne’s, from a reading of the opening of Book II of Lucretius’s *De Rerum Natura*. Although structural resemblances between their theories would in itself merit sustained attention, this methodological intimacy seems to offer a philological ground for the juxtaposition of their projects. Bacon and Montaigne share the highly specific gesture of offhandedly citing this passage in order to promote careless self-satisfaction, offering a gently hedonistic argument for the comparative benefits of “nonchalance” over importunity. Bacon writes:

We see in all other pleasures there is satiety, and after they be used, their verdure departeth; which sheweth well they be but deceits of pleasure, and not pleasures; and that it was the novelty which pleased, and not the quality.⁴⁷ And therefore we see that voluptuous men turn friars, and ambitious princes turn melancholy. But of knowledge there is no satiety, but satisfaction and appetite are perpetually interchangeable; and therefore appeareth to be good in itself simply, without fallacy or accident. Neither is that pleasure of small efficacy and contentment to the mind of man, which the poet Lucretius describeth elegantly, *Suave mari magno, turbantibus aequora ventis, &c.* ‘It is a view of delight’ (saith he) ‘to stand or walk upon the shore side, and to see a ship tossed with tempest upon the sea; or to be in a fortified tower, and to see two battles join upon a plain. But it is a pleasure incomparable, for the mind of man to be settled, landed, and fortified in the certainty of truth; and from thence to descry and behold the errors, perturbations, labours, and wanderings up and down of other men.’ (167)

Bacon advances the cause of “knowledge,” a term he uses interchangeably with “learning,”⁴⁸ by way of a critique of standard conceptions of “pleasure.” It is not simply that the pleasure of learning exceeds other ones, but that everything habitually understood as a source of pleasure is a camouflaged source of pain. All experiences of pleasure other than learning turn out to be temporary and thus “deceits of pleasure,” since only the “novelty” of those experiences, rather than their specific qualities, accounts for the enjoyment they provide. The rhythm of gratification is thus a rhythm of disappointment. Learning, on the other hand, offers an escape from perpetual discontent. Rather than posit simply that the pleasure of learning is always available and that its qualities rather than its novelty are themselves enjoyable, Bacon describes a peculiar temporal knot. If “satisfaction and appetite are perpetually interchangeable,” then the experience of learning is an involution of the timeline that obviates the neat differentiation of moments. To “know” is to experience “appetite” *as* “satisfaction,” desire *as* gratification. In this way, Bacon proposes a new category of feeling: if learning is an experience of desire as gratification, then it generates an infinite satisfaction without the climactic power of the “satisfaction” of “need.” Learning is infinitely more pleasurable than other activities, but infinitely less forceful than they are. It is intense, in the sense that it is a highly concentrated pleasure that lacks nothing, but it is weak, in the sense that it never packs the punch of wish fulfillment.

Like Montaigne, then, Bacon joins an experience of muted but flawless pleasure with a distortion of linear time. Indeed, Bacon sharpens this identification of “nonchalance” with the non-linear, describing illusory pleasures in the language of temporality so that both are disrupted with the same emancipatory gesture. Knowledge is “good in itself simply” because it belongs to a present tense which floats free from chronology. On the one hand, the quotation from Lucretius offers an alibi, moving the discussion from a vertiginous time warp where past and future are “interchangeable” to the stable “fortif[ication]” of the “certainty of truth.” On the other hand, the offhanded style of the quotation draws it into the logic of the foregoing analysis rather than signaling a change of direction. Bacon quotes the first line of the Latin text, and then cuts

⁴⁷ Though I consult Spedding and Kiernan, the extent to which I quote from Bacon has encouraged me to reproduce Vickers’ modernized spelling.

⁴⁸ The sentence immediately prior to the quoted passage, for instance, speaks of “the pleasure and delight of knowledge and learning...[which] surpasseth all other in nature....” (167).

abruptly off with an “&c.” Perhaps he simply refrains from quoting a passage with which his readers might be familiar. Yet he has no compunction about offering his own translation of the entire passage, suggesting that the slapdash “&c,” along with the lack of commentary on the quotation (all he offers is the vague remark that the “pleasure” Lucretius describes, like the one he theorizes in the preceding lines, is “of [no] small efficacy”), are examples of the careless freedom he promotes. Indeed, Bacon creates a sensation of haste by describing Lucretius’s words as “elegant” and then proceeding not to quote them.

Just as “De l’experience” develops the account of “nonchalance” in “De l’utile et de l’honneste” by emphasizing that impassioned states are prone to epistemological error—and that, conversely, casual indifference grants access to otherwise unobservable dimensions of experience—Bacon describes the weak intensity of “learning” as an epistemological breakthrough. Illusory pleasures are not only illusory; they also promote erroneous conclusions. Bacon illustrates this point metaphorically in the following gloss of the injunction from Ecclesiastes that “we make application of our knowledge to give ourselves repose and contentment, and not distaste or repining”:

...there is no vexation or anxiety of mind which resulteth from knowledge otherwise than merely by accident; for all knowledge and wonder (which is the seed of knowledge) is an impression of pleasure in itself: but when men fall to framing conclusions out of their knowledge, applying it to their particular, and ministering to themselves thereby weak fears or vast desires, there groweth that carefulness and trouble of mind which is spoken of: for then knowledge is no more ‘Lumen siccum,’ whereof Heraclitus the profound said, ‘Lumen siccum optima anima,’ but it becometh ‘Lumen madidum’ or ‘maceratum,’ being steeped and infused in the humours of the affections” (125).

The central distinction here is between two (allegedly) Heraclitian metaphors for “knowledge”: “dry light,” on the one hand, and “blurred light,” which is also described as “macerated light,” on the other. The soul (“anima”) loses its clarity of illumination when it is “steeped and infused in the humours of the affections.” The metaphor of “maceration” creates an image of a soul that softens and disintegrates when it is soaked in the pernicious fluids of the passions. It is for this reason that the beam of light it casts is “blurred”: the soul loses its capacity for focus and intensity when it is “macerated” by liquid feeling. Just as Bacon describes “knowledge” as “good in itself simply,” he explains that “anxiety” and the blurring it causes only happen “by accident”: “knowledge...is an impression of pleasure in itself.” Rather than banishing feeling, as more recent accounts of experimental science suggest, Bacon relocates feeling to the experience of learning, making it an activity that generates “pleasure” irrespective of its objects or conclusions. As in the passage about the interchangeability of “need” and “satisfaction,” Bacon emphasizes the interconnection of this self-contained “impression of pleasure” and a withdrawal from linear time. Problematic “affections” are the consequence of “framing conclusions”—distorting knowledge by enlisting it in teleological aspiration: “weak fears or vast desires,” both of which point to future experiences of gratification (safety or pleasure, which are really the same, since safety is the Lucretian pleasure of not being subject to someone else’s suffering).

A second resemblance to that passage (and to Montaigne’s *Essais*) is Bacon’s indication that the momentary retains a connection with the past and future, even as it escapes them. For it is not only “knowledge” but also “wonder (which is the seed of knowledge)” that Bacon

describes as an “impression of pleasure in itself.” “Wonder,” especially when it is described in good scholastic fashion as the “seed of knowledge,” suggests Aristotelian entelechy—a teleology *par excellence*. The very sentence in which Bacon describes an immanent, non-temporal experience of pleasure also refers back to the most traditional conception of linear desire: “knowledge” is the eventual fulfillment of “wonder,” and the latter produces the former the way a seed produces a plant. Just as the passage that cites Lucretius posits the interchangeability of “satisfaction” and “appetite” rather than simply describing the abolition of those experiences, this passage retains the temporal coordinates of “wonder” and “knowledge” even as it conflates them. Bacon refuses to abandon what everyone already knows about learning, choosing instead to describe such abandonment as inherent to the most traditional account of it. A remark that repeats a traditional conception of temporal desire and gratification simultaneously undermines it by identifying what should be two distinct stages in the process of learning: each is equally an “impression of pleasure in itself,” and furthermore, their affiliation gives Baconian “knowledge” the perpetually provisional, inconclusive, and unfulfilled qualities ordinarily associated with “wonder,” so that the vocabulary of teleology becomes the raw material of Bacon’s anti-teleological argument.

This last point is crucial, since the entire *Advancement* strategically redeploys traditional tropes in order to undo them. A good example is one of the *Advancement*’s overarching metaphors, of which the “maceration” of the soul is a typical instance: the distinction between error and truth is continually figured as a distinction between wet and dry. The “wet” soul produces falsehood while the “dry” one illuminates truth, and the “wet” pleasures of desire are eclipsed by the “dry” pleasures of casually indifferent “learning.” Yet the schoolmen, whose souls were Bacon’s chief examples of the dangers of “maceration,” were often called “dry,” in the sense of insipid, by their critics. “Our subtle Schoolmen...,” Robert Burton writes in the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, “are weak, dry, obscure.” More problematic than this is the traditional metaphorical connection between dryness and barrenness, including the barrenness of a weak mind that produces only fruitless fancies; these associations, as displayed in the following quotation from Spenser, are incompatible with Bacon’s productive, illusion-dispelling philosophy: Spenser refers to “One...whose dryer braine / Is tost with troubled sights and fancies weake,” drawing a connection between aridity of mind and a wayward indulgence in speculation (*OED*, “Dry”). Finally, being dry sometimes means being thirsty, which is not a fortuitous association for an account of desire as gratification. But Bacon turns all of these associations to his advantage, refashioning scholastic notions (of “wonder,” for example) so that a dry mind is one that is barren only in the sense that its progeny are intellectual rather than biological (born of moisture) and thirsty only in the sense that thirst, being interchangeable with satisfaction, is both infinite and infinitely undemanding. Bacon’s praise of dryness, which cuts across and revokes a range of conventional associations, signals the extent to which his philosophy departs from tradition.

One of the cleverest deployments of this vocabulary of moisture is Bacon’s head-on critique of the scholastics, whose philosophy is figured as a spider’s web: apparently dry to the observer’s eye, but in fact a sticky excretion (like the “soye” from Montaigne’s “vers”)—a worthless labor that also serves as a trap for the mind. In this famous passage, Bacon’s argument is strongly evocative of Montaigne’s critique of systematic thought, especially in its suggestion that the danger of the systematic is the authority it grants the past:

This kind of degenerate learning did chiefly reign amongst the schoolmen; who having sharp and strong wits, and abundance of leisure, and small variety of reading; but their wits being shut up in the cells of a few authors (chiefly Aristotle their dictator) as their persons were shut up in the cells of monasteries and colleges; and knowing little history, either of nature or time; did out of no great quantity of matter, and infinite agitation of wit, spin out unto us those laborious webs of learning which are extant in their books. For the wit and mind of man, if it work upon matter, which is the contemplation of the creatures of God, worketh according to the stuff, and is limited thereby; but if it work upon itself, as the spider worketh his web, then it is endless, and brings forth cobwebs of learning, admirable for the fineness of thread and work, but of no substance or profit. (140)

The spider's "cobweb," like the worm's silk, is a paltry substitute for learning: an extension of the self in the place of an experience of otherness. Bacon follows Montaigne in launching a critique of philosophical tautology: the endless extension and reworking of the given. Bacon favors a "nonchalant" openness to the contingencies of the exterior world. The schoolmen's solipsism derives from spatial enclosure (in monastic cells), paucity of reading, ignorance of historical events, and ignorance of natural history. Like Montaigne's critique of the tautology that derives from reverence for authority (like that of the law in "De l'experience"), Bacon's discussion of these diverse forms of solipsism treats all of them as versions of a slavish devotion to "a few authors," and especially to "Aristotle their dictator." The establishment of an authoritative philosophical system obviates the need to leave the monastic cell or read beyond the equally narrow scholastic cannon.

The emotional experience of the schoolmen is a consequence of this solipsism: an infinite desire for knowledge is confronted with "no great quantity of matter," and the mind relentlessly works upon the same material, seeking novelty in the endlessly similar. This is a hyperbolic version of the experience of illusory pleasure described above: it takes ample experience to turn an "ambitious prince" into a "melanchol[ic]"—each of his many conquests have to prove unsatisfying for him to grasp his error—but the schoolmen are immediately confronted with the illusory nature of the pleasures they seek in the knowledge proffered by Aristotle. They are immediately rendered frantic by the joylessness of their pursuit. No matter the "agitation" and "laborious[ness]" of the activity, its results are "of no substance or profit."

Bacon contrasts such a procedure with the "contemplation of the creatures of God" (where "creatures" refers to all creation), an experience that would never produce this maximal contrast between *desire for* and *scarcity of* experiences of otherness. Were the observer's gaze wayward enough to explore every facet of God's creation—were it free to ramble in the world beyond the monk's cell—every desire for novelty would be met as soon as it arose. Like the Montaigne of "De l'experience," Bacon is often thought to favor the direct observation of the world over the mediated experience of reading—but here, as in "De l'experience," no such opposition obtains. The solipsism at issue is a consequence of epistemological authority: it is not a confinement to books but a confinement to *certain* books and *certain* places, *certain* presuppositions and *certain* modes of argument. The question of quantity is also a question of quality: subservience to Aristotle means subservience to a specific set of materials and modes of thinking. Bacon's alternative would entail an "agitation"-free exploration of God's variegated world: its sights and sounds no less than its texts.

In this portrait of a natural philosopher who experiences epistemological openness as a corollary of weakness of feeling, it is difficult to make out the better-known image of a manipulative, authoritarian Bacon, one who vehemently promotes a new, experimental philosophy in the interest of subjecting the natural world to human will. The vehemence that makes the power-hungry Bacon impossible to ignore also undermines the seriousness with which his programmatic statements can be taken. It is exactly this sort of vehemence that Bacon's Montaignian moments teach the reader not to trust. Bacon is by turns manipulative and gentle, defiant and submissive in the face of contingency, emphatic and ironic in his praise of teleological progress. My attention to the casual indifference at the heart of experimental observation reveals the non-teleological tug of Bacon's reflections, and the corresponding weakness of his position vis-à-vis the contingent forces that animate the natural world he wishes to name.

Bacon's ironic gestures of modesty with respect to his own capacity for overwhelming feeling are emblems of the contradictions of his argument. Bacon's fulsome obsequiousness before his royal audience at the beginning of Book II, for instance, maximizes his rhetoric of unassailable achievement and infinite advancement while simultaneously sending an oblique message that such a dream is rendered null by the intense passion from which it derives. "Queen Elizabeth," Bacon writes,

was a sojourner in the world in respect of her unmarried life; and was a blessing to her own times; and yet so as the impression of her good government, besides her happy memory, is not without some effect which doth survive her. But to your Majesty, whom God hath already blessed with so much royal issue, worthy to continue and represent you for ever, and whose youthful and fruitful bed doth yet promise many the like renovations, it is proper and agreeable to be conversant not only in the transitory parts of good government, but in those acts also which are in their nature permanent and perpetual. Amongst the which (if affection do not transport me) there is not any more worthy than the further endowment of the world with sound and fruitful knowledge. (169)

In these lines, Bacon is at his most programmatic; experimental philosophy is to be adopted and promoted, funded and extended, so as to grant the world a body of knowledge that is both certain ("sound") and productive ("fruitful"). For anyone who wishes to picture Bacon as the "father" or "prophet" of modern science (for better or for worse), this passage is gold: Bacon wants political authority to establish the normative status of his philosophical program, and in true prophetic fashion, he imagines a "permanent" and "perpetual" advancement. Yet in the midst of this implicitly hortatory piece of advocacy, Bacon suggests that his enthusiasm for the program in question represents exactly the sort of emotional overinvestment that occludes the natural philosopher's vision. Bacon ironizes himself, writing, "if affection do not transport me," interrupting the sentence in which he finally completes the belabored thought that the advancement of science is the most "worthy" act of "good government." When Bacon is at his most teleological, he indicates that he is in the grip of error-inducing passion.

It is no surprise that this gesture comes at the beginning of Book II, where Book I's more general discussion of the "excellency of learning and knowledge" gives way to the explicitly systematic account of "what the particular acts and works are which have been embraced and undertaken for the advancement of learning, and again what defects and undervalues" (122). It is

here that the *Advancement* is most emphatic about comprehensiveness, systematicity, and teleology. Toward the end of the introductory section of Book II (from which the self-undermining passage on “good government” is taken), Bacon repeats the ironic gesture. “My purpose,” he writes, “is at this time to note only omissions and deficiencies, and not to make any redargution of errors or incomplete prosecutions; for it is one thing to set forth what ground lieth unmanured, and another thing to correct ill husbandry in that which is manured” (174). He continues:

In the handling and undertaking of which work I am not ignorant what it is that I do now move and attempt, nor insensible of mine own weakness to sustain my purpose. But my hope is that if my extreme love to learning carry me too far, I may obtain the excuse of affection; for that ‘it is not granted to man to love and to be wise.’” (175)

Even the preliminary act of taking stock of the present state of knowledge, which leaves the rectification of errors and the filling of gaps to the future, is gainsaid by the maxim that “love” and “wis[dom]” are incompatible. As in the passage on “good government,” Bacon self-ironizes in the conditional: “if my extreme love to learning carry me too far,” he writes, suggesting once again that the systematic dimension of his project is evidence of his absorption in passionate enthusiasm. Bacon adopts a magisterial tone only to undermine it with the oblique suggestion that he only speaks this way because his soul, as he puts it in the passage on Heraclitus, is “steeped and infused in the humours of the affections.”

It is on the basis of these passages that the first Bacon, the one who champions the elevation of human power and teleological progress, confronts the second one, who encourages weakness of feeling. The Bacon who explains, “The ways of sapience are not much liable either to particularity or chance,” both is and is not the same Bacon who admits, “So in the culture and cure of the mind of man, two things are without our command; points of nature, and points of fortune; for to the basis of the one, and the conditions of the other, our work is limited and tied” (198, 256). Bacon towers and stoops, steels his will and lets it evaporate. The latter terms in these oppositions are evidence of the Montaignian inheritance that bequeaths an epistemology of muted affect to subsequent generations of Baconian writers and researchers.

Chapter 2

Literary Theory for Scientists: Robert Boyle's "Loose and Desultory Way of Writing"

Toward the end of Robert Boyle's *Occasional Reflections* (1665), a collection of meditations on everyday occurrences, the author describes a fishing companion kneeling by the riverside and drinking water from the brim of his hat. (This episode belongs to an interpolated narrative recounting a fishing expedition, which is broken into separate meditations on the events that transpire over the course of the day's journey.) The description and the ensuing reflection are remarkable for the incompatible senses of the term "careless" they juxtapose without acknowledgment—for, one might say, the carelessness with which they employ the term.

First, Boyle's fictional friend, Eugenius, "took up with his Hat, which by Cocking the Brims he turn'd into a kind of Cup, such a proportion of Water that he quench'd his Thirst with it; and carelessly throwing the rest upon the Ground, quickly return'd toward the Company" (122-3).⁴⁹ The other fishermen draw a contrast between this improvised technique for gathering water and the act of "stooping lower" to drink "immediately out of the entire River," a distinction that occasions a conversation about the advantages of adequate wealth (a mere hatful of riches) over extravagance (a rushing river of lucre) (123). Eusebius, another member of the fishing party, explains that Eugenius's makeshift vessel must have "suffic'd him fully to quench his Thirst," since he "[poured] away...some of the remaining Water as superfluous" (123). Should he have used the whole river as his drinking cup, it would have served little purpose. Eugenius acts "carelessly" in the sense that he makes a casual display of his contentment.

Boyle's prose conveys the same self-satisfaction: Eusebius's words are as superfluous as spilt water. The mildness of Eugenius's thirst, which ensures that he does not have to gulp madly from the river, does not need to be pointed out, since no extraordinary exertion precedes the present narration. The carelessness of Eusebius's observations, like that of Eugenius's behavior, suggests innocent gratification—in this case, the pleasure that attends idle chatter. Without worry or self-consciousness, Eugenius takes up the modest amount of water he desires and unthinkingly demonstrates the sufficiency of what he has by pouring the remainder on the ground. Eusebius, for his part, satisfies a desire to hear himself speak by explaining the self-evident.

Although Eusebius luxuriates in descriptive language, his observations are not entirely gratuitous—but the purpose they serve is literary rather than psychological. They lay the analogical foundation for the moral reflections on luxury that comprise the remainder of the chapter, thereby occasioning the episode's second, discordant use of the term "careless." The "famously Rich," everyone agrees, can only acquire troublesome "cares" along with their wealth—since they are, according to the terms of the analogy, river guzzlers, overwhelmed by their appetites (125). "Nor will Carelessness secure them," Eusebius explains, "since a provident concern of a Man's Estate, though it be great, being by the Generality of Men look'd upon as a Duty, and a part of Prudence, he cannot suffer himself to be wrong'd or cheated of that, without losing, with his Right, his Reputation" (126). Allowing one's riches to be lost exposes one to the charge of irresponsibility. For "the rich," then, carelessness implies either an ethical failure, or,

⁴⁹ Lloyd speculates about an autobiographical origin to this narrative that connects it to Izaak Walton's *Compleat Angler* (1653), suggesting that Boyle might have accompanied Walton and Henry Wotton on fishing expeditions, or simply listened to their conversations about fishing, when he was a student at Eton.

more probably, a performance of emotional ease that conceals a worry about holding onto one's fortune.

It is worth noticing that the tone of the dialogue has shifted in parallel with the transformation of carelessness from humble simplicity into the dissimulation of worry. Eusebius's self-serious pronouncements are presented as friendly banter, but they are unmistakably sententious. What begins as a gratuitous description of a casual sip of water becomes a moral disquisition on avarice, and the "carelessness" of the latter, like that of "the rich," with their hidden anxiety about guarding their property, is nothing more than a pose.

In the previous chapter, I explored the Montaignian "nonchalance" at the heart of Francis Bacon's experimental program. In this chapter, I suggest that the interest of experimentalists in such a state of feeling posed a practical problem, as indicated by the oscillation of Boyle's "carelessness" between the poles of ease and exertion, authenticity and fakery. I propose that the *Reflections* offers a literary solution to that problem. If experimentalists advocate casual indifference, but the latter is defined by its uncultivated nature (a cultivated indifference would not be casual), what purpose does such advocacy serve? To speak of "nonchalance" (Montaigne), of a state in which "appetite and satisfaction are perpetually interchangeable," so that every desire is canceled from the very beginning by its gratification (Bacon), or of leisurely pastoral "carelessness" (Boyle) is to speak of an experience of pleasure untarnished by the labor of self-discipline. Yet to commend those experiences to one's reader is to imply that one would do well to cultivate them. Affective ends are clarified while the means for their attainment remain unclear.

The *Reflections* is frequently characterized by this logical knot, which it loosens by way of the very disposition under discussion. Boyle reminds readers that carelessness should not be confused with rigorous indifference, and then he grants himself license, by way of that casual disposition, to leave it at that. A version of this gesture is already visible in Boyle's fishing expedition, though the status of the *Reflections* as experimentalist advocacy remains to be shown (below). Consider the transformation of "carelessness" from that of a simple draught of water to that of an anxious pose—from the satisfaction of a momentary need to a labored posture necessitated by one's place in the social order—and the parallel shift in the speaker's tone. Should the reader ask herself whether the narrator's initial insouciance is best understood as artlessness or artifice, she finds in place of an answer that he has strolled away from the original meditation and into another one (at the level of explicit literary organization, this is a transition from "Upon ones Drinking water out of the Brims of his Hat" to "On seeing Boys swim with Bladders"):

But taking several ways, as Chance or Inclination directed us...it was my Fortune to hold the same course with *Lindamor*, and both of us, by following no Guide, but the design of shunning all beaten Paths, and unshelter'd Grounds, that being the likeliest way to reach our double end of Coolness and Privacy: after we had a while walked somewhat near the River-side, we were at length brought to a Shady place... (129)

In search of "Coolness," guided only by "Chance or Inclination," the narrator saunters away, conveying exactly the casual attitude about which the reader has been wondering. (He is simultaneously fussy, however, deliberately avoiding "beaten Paths," and perhaps in this way staging the difficulties of achieving truly effortless nonchalance.) The string of prepositional and

participial phrases, combined with the suspension of the verb that clarifies the narrator and Lindamor's destination ("we were at length brought to a Shady place"), creates the sensation that the text itself has meandered away from the problem in a leisurely fashion. Boyle meets a question about nonchalance with a performance of nonchalance.

This is not to say that Boyle simply shrugs off the question of ends without means (a state of effortless indifference that rules out both the desire and the effort its attainment would seem to require). He short-circuits an answer to the reader's question by simply creating a readerly opportunity for receptivity; the experience of reading itself should suffice to dispel suspicion. This is the argument of the present chapter: Boyle's style, which makes an experience of carelessness available to the reader without any effort on her part, is a solution to the paradox of cultivated non-cultivation. The text is structured as a sequence of disconnected observations, which encourages an effortless reading practice, placing no obligation on the reader to proceed in order or even to relate one part of the text to another. Boyle shows that such casual indifference yields the sort of insight that experimentalist inquiry aims to encourage, and then lets the reader see for herself. The same could be said for many of the protagonists of my project, but Boyle goes farther than any of them in articulating a literary theory on the basis of his trust in carelessness—a fact that deserves critical attention, given that Boyle's status as a literary figure is close to nil.⁵⁰ Boyle characterizes literary style as a form of experiment, granting the written word, especially when it suspends generic categories in the manner of the *Reflections*, a crucial role in the experience of discovery. Indeed, Boyle blends humanist invention together with scientific discovery so that rhetorical effects yield epistemological insights.

Boyle's argument about style depends on the insight that "chance" has the capacity to solve the problem of a desirable state of feeling that can only be experienced if the search for it remains unattempted. Boyle's literary theory, I suggest, is about the role of contingency in experimentalist writing: he explores a literary form that both takes its cues from chance and induces chance associations in the minds of readers. The linking of contingency and disposition is already visible in Boyle's meandering pathway along the riverside: "directed" by "Chance or Inclination," Boyle's exploratory journey is guided by contingent feelings. This connection offers a solution to the problem of self-discipline I have unfolded. Boyle places careless "Inclinations" outside the realm of human calculation, granting authority instead to the intangible operations of "chance," which inhabit the human body in the form of such "Inclinations." In this way, Boyle lifts the onus of responsibility placed on the reader by celebrations of ease. Like Montaigne, who favors an ethics of emotional habit rather than one of principle,⁵¹ making moral judgment a consequence of circumstance rather than dogma, Boyle's interest is the contingent disruptions of plans and expectations. Carelessness is submission to what is not within one's power, including natural phenomena that would normally be obscured by the labor of purposive thought.

After situating the *Reflections* in relation to Boyle's career as a natural philosopher, I argue that Francis Bacon's misunderstood theory of literary value is the most instructive context for reading Boyle's meditations. I draw a contrast between Bacon's vision of an anti-hierarchical literary form and the main line of Renaissance literary theory, with its emphasis on the static opposition between teacher and student. With this context in mind, I return to Boyle's

⁵⁰ See my discussion below in Section I.

⁵¹ See Chapter 1, especially Section II, for more on this conception of ethics.

Reflections to show how his Baconian literary theory seeks a mode of composition that foils pedagogy by granting access to the anarchic powers of contingency. The carelessness of Boyle's writing is a novel response to the problem of ends without means, one that draws from both Bacon's theory of affect and his literary theory in order to offer an unmethodical, errantly progressive way forward. I show that the "method" for which Boyle is famous and the vision of historical "progress" with which he is habitually linked both need to be rethought on the basis of his wayward persona.

One of the reasons for exploring Boyle's interest in the limits of human calculation and the power of contingent encounters between persons and things is his canonical status in a history of science that generally marginalizes such interests: much of what is said about seventeenth-century natural philosophy, which tends to emphasize the calculable and verifiable, even if it softens such concepts by associating them with the merely probable, derives from interpretations of Boyle's experiments with the air pump. As Shapin and Schaeffer have observed about those experiments, "Of all subjects in the history of science it might be thought that this would be the one about which least new could be said" (4). Their own now-canonical argument again confirms Boyle's canonical status, but differs from foregoing accounts in its emphasis on the constructed nature of matters of fact. Constructed or not, such an emphasis on fact evades Boyle's imaginative exploration of the contingent. Shapin and Schaeffer's focus on "secur[ing] assent" precludes an attention to the deep uncertainties that characterize Boyle's meditations, which maximize flights of fancy no less than careless attention to the accidental. I do not believe that canonical readings of Boyle are incorrect; I suggest instead that attending to other aspects of Boyle's thought reveals a counter-tradition at the very heart of Baconian natural philosophy. As the following section shows, Boyle's experimentalism takes surprising turns for the unmethodical, favoring wildly associative thought and observation over the confirmation of facts through serial experimentation.

I. "Something by way of Method": The Science of Boyle's *Reflections*

Boyle's most recognizably scientific writings date from a late phase in his career—well after the composition of the *Reflections*. One of the premises of my inquiry, however, is that the "recognizably scientific" is not a suitable rubric for understanding experimentalism. Indeed, if twenty-first century assumptions about what counts as science remain untroubled, many Baconians do not look "scientific"—to say nothing of Bacon himself. Boyle's career often functions as a synecdoche for the intellectual history of the period, so that an early interest in moral philosophy gives way to a properly "scientific" interest in natural phenomena—just as the spiritual concerns of a fading medieval devotional culture give way to the secular philosophy of proto-Enlightenment. Some of the most insightful recent criticism on Boyle has challenged his putative "modernity," but little has been said about the way the sort of casual biography upon which Boyle scholars construct their arguments encodes a teleological narrative in which science triumphs over faith.⁵²

Scholars like Lawrence M. Principe present a straightforward account of maturation in which Boyle turns from moral and literary interests to scientific ones (even as Principe argues for the persistent influence of romance on Boyle's mature style): on this understanding, Boyle

⁵² See Principe ("Aspiring Adept") for Boyle's alchemical interests and Michael Hunter ("Scrupulosity") for his concern with casuistry and conscience.

ultimately arrives at “an interest in science *qua* science” (394). Others present a more nuanced view, suggesting that Boyle’s seemingly pre-scientific writings might be understood as inextricable from his natural philosophical investigations: “Instead of a break,” writes Scott Black, “I see a bridge across which what Boyle calls a ‘way of thinking’ spans his moral and natural philosophies” (68). But even the latter view, which mostly accords with my own, implies a steady progress from spiritual concerns to earthly ones: Black’s “bridge” can only be crossed in one direction. The *Reflections*, he writes, “offers one point of transfer in which a practice of Protestant reading begins to develop into a desacralized natural science (an end-point Boyle’s own work neither reaches nor aspires to)” (79). Black’s parenthesis raises the question of how one might discern such a “point of transfer,” if not simply by situating Boyle’s works in readymade histories of secularization.

In fact, the history of the composition and publication of the *Reflections* suggests a relationship of interdependence between moral and natural philosophy. Michael Hunter dates the composition of the manuscript to the years 1647 and 1648, which places it in exactly the period Principe identifies with changes in Boyle’s interests: “the decade from 1644-1655,” he explains, sees Boyle’s “transformation from a writer of moral and devotional tracts into a natural philosopher” (Principe 378). The date of composition lends credence to Black’s argument that “a practice of reflection that is indispensable to [Boyle’s] natural philosophy” can already be observed in the *Reflections*—an unsurprising claim about a text composed during a period in which Boyle’s attention was gradually turning to science.

However, Black’s suggestion can be radicalized: Boyle returned to the *Reflections* repeatedly, making it a palimpsest of different historical and biographical moments; it is more indicative of the continual interrelation of Boyle’s interests than of a transition from one to another. In 1657, two years after the “decade” of “transformation,” Boyle attached a “Proemial Essay” to the *Reflections*, explaining its aims. In 1665, after the publication of such landmark “scientific” texts as *New Experiments Physico-Mechanicall: Touching the Spring of the Air and its Effects* (1660) and *The Sceptical Chymist* (1661), Boyle finally saw it fit to publish the *Reflections*. Boyle seems to have retained an interest in the *Reflections* as he passed from his “early” to his “late” phase: he might even have edited and amended the text before its publication, making 1665 as much a date of composition as of publication.⁵³ The itinerary of the *Reflections* through time and space gives the lie to the tidy distinctions scholars have projected onto Boyle’s biography—between the literary and the scientific, the sacred and the secular. Boyle, who treated natural philosophy as if it were a species of moral philosophy, lived his life in keeping with that assumption; composing meditations as a scientist and conducting experiments as acts of devotion.

This is roughly the position of J. Paul Hunter (not to be confused with Michael Hunter, quoted above), who speaks, as I do, of the *Reflections*’ role in the “democratization of empiricism” (278).⁵⁴ In keeping with the assumed antipathy between literature and science,

⁵³ See Hunter (“Works”).

⁵⁴ Sargent argues that “empiricism” is not the right term for Boyle’s philosophy, since his investment in mechanical causality exceeds an empiricist interest in restricting claims to “descriptive accounts of observable regularities” (2). In my view, the *Occasional Reflections* displays a different line of reasoning from the affirmation of causal explanations, privileging instead the contingent relationships between events and their consequences.

however, the impulse to save the *Reflections* from relegation to a pre- or proto-scientific realm has often entailed the effacement of its unique literary form: if it's science, the argument seems to go, it's *science*—not literature. Just as in the previous chapter I defended Bacon from the charge that he was a scientific “failure,” arguing that his natural philosophy was *about* exactly the sort of tentativeness for which he has been faulted, it now falls to me to defend Boyle from the claim that he was a bad writer (Vickers 3). It is as if the affirmation of either literary or scientific value rules out the possibility of the other—whereas, in the *Reflections*, Boyle's literary and scientific endeavors are inseparable.

Hunter's innovative argument that Boylean practices of interpretation help create a reading public suitable to the emergence of the novel is compelling, but, like many assessments of his moral and natural philosophy, it discounts him as a serious thinker:

Boyle largely deserves the place Swift and history have given him, the specialist who strayed too far from his expertise: he is like a good, well-meaning actor who strays into politics (as distinguished from bad actors who stray into politics), and it is hard to feel sorry for him in spite of good intentions. But he deserves a larger niche in literary, cultural, and intellectual history, though not because he was a great or even a clear thinker. Rather, his pedestrian commitments make him important in the history of taste, desire, and ideas, for his fuzzy categories and refusals to make distinctions are in fact responsible for popularizing ways of thinking crucial to the reception of novels. (276)

Hunter assumes post-Enlightenment criteria for “scientificity” and then faults Boyle for lacking them; in this account, “[clarity]” is a prerequisite for “great[ness],” and Boyle lacks both. Had Boyle any chance of intellectual importance, it would have to be that of an Immanuel Kant—with his meticulous distinctions and delimitations. But Boyle's “fuzzy categories” and “refusals to make distinctions” are at the heart of his experimentalism: as my interpretation of the *Reflections* will show, the conceptual haziness of the careless observer exposes him to “chance” occurrences. Discovery, in the sense of self-exposure to the unforeseen, depends on “fuzzy categories.”

Like most appraisals of Boyle's style, Hunter does not explore the specific resources of Boyle's unique brand of experimentalism. The rhetoric Hunter employs to discount Boyle's philosophical prowess also serves to impugn his skill as a writer: “No one (except perhaps Boyle himself) ever imagined his style to be distinguished or even very organized—he often rambles along about whatever interests him, and sometimes the sentences seem to unfold or re-entangle in a way that surprises the author himself—but as an encouragement to would-be-meditators his practice is exemplary” (287). Just as Boyle was not “a great or *even* a clear thinker,” his style is not “distinguished or *even* very organized” (italics mine). “[Clarity]” and “organiz[ation]” are *preconditions* for “[distinction].” And yet Hunter's admission that such a style serves the “exemplary” function of “encourag[ing]” others to take up the practice of meditation casts doubt on the soundness of the criteria by which he renders judgment. Why is the invention of a literary form that models and promotes an innovative spiritual and natural-philosophical practice not sufficient to “distinguish” the *Reflections*? As my analysis will show, “rambling,” like the production of conceptual “fuzz[iness],” is an activity Boyle explicitly theorizes as a means to experimentalist insight. To “[surprise] the author himself” is exactly the point.

Perhaps the most significant obstacle to understanding the *Reflections* is the assumption that the advent of modern science is identical with the emergence of an impersonal method. Indeed, the scholarly confusions I have already described can be understood as symptoms of that assumption: progressivist biographical interpretations posit that Boyle grows ever-more-methodical over the course of his career, just as negative evaluations of his writing style fault him for not being the methodical thinker his reputation as a “modern scientist” suggests he should have been. Although my focus in this opening section is a critique of prevailing interpretations of Boyle, it is worth quoting briefly from the *Reflections* to demonstrate his evasion of the responsibility of “method.” The following remark appears at the end of the first chapter of “A Discourse touching Occasional Meditations,” which prefaces the *Reflections* (along with an “Advertisement,” an “Introductory Preface,” and a dedication—the conjunction of which creates an impression of redoubled hesitation that would do Bacon proud):

And I should judge it a very natural Distribution to divide the following Discourse into two parts, the first of which should contain some Invitations to the Cultivating of this sort of Meditations, and the latter should offer something by way of Method, towards the better framing of them. But lest I should at this time be hinder'd from treating of each of them distinctly, I will at present omit that Division, and endeavour in recompence so to deliver the Motives I am to propose, that the first part of the Discourse may not appear maim'd, though it be unattended by the second, and yet the Particulars that might compose the second, may (if it prove convenient to mention them at this time) be commodiously enough inserted in opportune places of the first. (3)

Boyle describes “Method” as an expectation others will have of the *Reflections* (the fact that he “should offer” a methodology to his readers does not mean that he wishes to do so), and the specific locution suggests a duty for which he has little regard: “something by way of Method” is the verbal equivalent of waving his hand at the issue; in order to satisfy readers, it behooves him to offer them “something.” And yet he decides to leave methodology out, worrying about the vague possibility that he “should at this time be hinder'd from treating” it. Readers will have to rest content with the “insert[ion]” of commentary on method “in opportune places,” which they can expect of Boyle “if it prove convenient to mention them at this time.” As it turns out, the *Reflections*' suspension of method remains in effect, no matter how far one reads.

Boyle's rhetoric of casual unconcern is typical of the *Reflections*, as it is of the literature of experimentalist affect; furthermore, it is no accident that method is the object of this initial gesture of unconcern. Boyle, like Montaigne before him, is more amenable to an un-emphatic departure from the norm than he is to polemic: he would rather offhandedly postpone a discussion of method than launch an argument against its necessity. Although Boyle shrugs at the imperative of method, he presents that shrug as a gesture of scrupulosity: he seems to set method aside in order to make a priority of what he calls “Invitations” (what we might call “acts of persuasion”), taking pains to focus on this most important of matters before anyone or anything has time to interrupt him. And yet he is rather flamboyant about the liberty he is taking, acknowledging parenthetically that he will only return to issues of method “if it prove convenient” to do so. Adding to this sense of ostentatious disregard is his suggestion that a discourse on meditation that abandons method—exactly the sort of discourse he seems now in the midst of composing—might rightly be understood as “maim'd,” even if the vague intention

of intermixing a presently absent methodology with later parts of the discourse will ensure that such violence is less than “apparent.” In this way, Boyle displays an unusual combination of flippancy and scrupulosity: he drops the burden of method by way of a gesture of meticulous concern for engaging readers in a practice of meditation that would seem to benefit from exactly the sort of method he is in the midst of casting aside.

The imperative to retrieve “scientific method” from Boyle’s work, which often has the effect of marginalizing the *Reflections*, requires the suppression of the waywardness this passage flaunts—even in scholarship that actually focuses on the *Reflections*. James Paradis, who shares my interest in Boyle’s adoption of the Montaignian essay as an experimentalist genre, claims to observe the separation of scientific fact from personal reflection in Boyle’s works—the careful differentiation of methodical procedure from the stylistic individuality of Montaignian self-portrait.⁵⁵ “In adapting the essay to the goals of the experimentalist,” Paradis writes,

Boyle shifted its focus from the internal, psychological world of Montaigne’s uniquely personal speculations to the external, physical world of replicable material process. In so doing, he transformed the self, a unique, expressive intelligence in Montaigne’s essay, into a passive instrument of observation, reporting on self-demonstrated material truths. (78)

Setting aside the question of whether “express[ion]” is the right metaphor for Montaigne’s *Essais*,⁵⁶ I disagree with the claim that Boyle renders himself “instrument[al]”—and with the larger view, shared by most scholars of experimentalism, that scientific observation requires the evacuation of the self.⁵⁷ Like my reading of Andrew Marvell in Chapter Three, my interpretation

⁵⁵ Principe’s account of Boyle’s relationship to the Montaignian essay is also unsatisfactory. He writes: “While the form is in fact similar and undoubtedly derives from the essayist tradition, Boyle’s prolix, discursive style and layered syntax diverges widely from the *style coupé* of Montaigne and the similar pithiness of Bacon” (“Virtuous Romance” 395). Yet, as most readers of Montaigne and Bacon would readily acknowledge, these figures do not share a “similar pithiness”: Montaigne’s wandering ruminations are worlds away from Bacon’s compressed, aphoristic assertions. The adjectives Principe attributes to Boyle’s style—“prolix” and “discursive”—are good descriptions of Montaigne’s. I am also unconvinced of Principe’s argument that Boyle’s style owes a great deal to the romance. His account of this debt is simply too cursory to hold persuasive power: “Boyle’s mature style, syntactically considered, is not unlike contemporary French fictional prose (shorn of much of its self-conscious rhetorical pretentiousness) in terms of sentence length and complexity, its preference for balanced parallel constructions, and its high descriptive content” (395). In my view, Montaigne remains the most instructive literary precedent for the *Reflections*. Whereas many of the figures I discuss in these pages draw inspiration from a Montaignian strand of Baconianism, Boyle interestingly seems to draw heavily on Montaigne *beyond* his affiliation with Bacon: the form of the *Essais* themselves bears heavily on the *Reflections*.

⁵⁶ See my Introduction and Chapter 1, Section III, for more on the inadequacy of expressive metaphors in interpretations of Montaigne.

⁵⁷ See Gal and Chen-Morris on the “disappearance of the observer”—a phenomenon I dispute in the case of English experimentalism.

of the *Reflections* shows that idiosyncrasy and personality are not incompatible with the practice of experiment. Indeed, this assertion points to one of the underlying stakes of my argument: the difference between sheer dispassion and casual indifference (between prevailing accounts of natural philosophical affect and my own) can be understood as an opposition between the indifference of an evacuated self and the indifference of a gently receptive one. Experimentalism celebrated corporate personhood—not corporate impersonality. Baconians often explored the transpersonal without endorsing the impersonal, integrating individual experiences without effacing their singularity.

Steven Shapin’s well-known studies of Boyle and other *virtuosi* are more sensitive than most to the persistence of the individual persona in the practice of experimental science. Because Shapin’s emphasis falls on laborious acts of self-creation, however, that persona itself becomes an artifact of disciplined self-construction—without any of the mystery and unpredictability that distinguish Boylean individuality (to say nothing of its Montaignian and Baconian progenitors). Personality becomes as much a product of method as scientific fact. Shapin writes: “The life of virtue was *work*: thought had to be controlled by arduous labor; a sincere self had to be laboriously constructed, inspected, and maintained” (164). On this understanding, experimentalists disciplined themselves along with their readership. As Shapin, writing with Simon Schaeffer, puts it: “Boyle sought to secure assent by way of the experimentally generated matter of fact,” so that the vise grip of method squeezes both the reader and the natural world until they both cry mercy (23). Sometimes, this vocabulary is explicitly violent: “It was to be nature, not man, that *enforced* assent” (79, italics mine). The attempt to “enforce” a particular response could scarcely be farther from the gentle invitation to meditation I explore in these pages.

II. “Syrup of Violets”: On the Pleasures of Post-Humanist Literary Theory

Of course it is a convention of Boyle scholarship to describe his natural philosophy as a Baconian inheritance. So far, however, the terms of the discussion have excluded the literary-critical dimension of that relationship. Indeed, Bacon’s own contribution to early modern literary theory has mostly escaped notice, perhaps because scholars tend to paint him as an anti-literary or anti-linguistic philosopher—one who seeks to reach past the illusions of language and grasp unmediated materiality.⁵⁸ In fact, Bacon proposes an innovative poetics that undermines the pedagogical relationship between writer and reader implied by most Renaissance literary theory; he suggests that literary language is animated not by the pedagogue who imbues it with meaning but instead by the non-linguistic situations in which it is embedded and the interpersonal conversations in which it figures. This does not mean that language is simply “contextualized,” however; the point is to grant language the worldly life of other phenomena without treating it as either a passive aftereffect of those phenomena or a realm of autonomous self-reflexivity. Bacon’s literary theory de-ontologizes both language in general and literature in particular.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Similar intentions are often ascribed to the *virtuosi*. See Goodman (23-24) and Starr for accounts of the problems associated with the generalization of Thomas Sprat’s claims to experimentalism in general.

⁵⁹ My discussion treats “poetry” and “rhetoric” as similarly “literary,” following similar identifications in the corpus of Renaissance poetics itself. I do not seek to shore up the

What I call “post-Humanism” is different from Bacon’s putative “anti-Humanism,” which Brian Vickers has persuasively, if somewhat contemptuously, dismissed. Vickers points out that Bacon’s critique of *copia* is actually an example of “a debate over *imitatio* carried out within humanism” and that it is not, in fact, “an attack on *copia, tout court*, but describes what happens when writers cultivate *copia verborum* in separation from *copia rerum*” (141, 149). Even if Bacon has to be read as a kind of humanist, I suggest he also pictures a post-Humanism in which distinctions between form and content and between pedagogue and student lose their hold on rhetoric and poetics. A further complication is that the neat distinctions of humanist literary theory tend not to match the innovations of humanist literary practice: Bacon hyperbolizes these literary innovations and finds ways to theorize them.

Before turning to a close examination of the poetics of Boyle’s *Reflections*, I wish to describe Bacon’s literary theory in more detail, and offer a preliminary account of Boyle’s instantiation of that theory. In this section, I reconstruct a context for the interpretation of the *Reflections* by comparing Bacon and Boyle’s responses to Horatian metaphors of literary pleasure. I suggest that whereas most humanist literary theory adopts a Horatian model in which literature is aligned with pleasure, and both are understood as allurements to philosophical education, Baconian literary theory abandons the distinction between (pleasurable) form and (medicinal or nutritional) content (between, that is, literature and philosophy), describing pleasurable discursive forms as *occasions for* rather than *receptacles of* philosophical insight and exploration—opportunities for reflection or response rather than messages to be received. After defending Bacon’s status as a literary theorist, in the sense that he theorizes the literary as a crucial dimension of natural philosophy, I discuss his revision of the Horatian metaphor of literary sweetness. Boyle also revises this metaphor, defending the sort of lawless rhetorical proliferation Bacon rejects—but doing so on the basis of a Baconian logic.

James Stephens, a critic whose explicit focus on Bacon’s “style” would seem to imply a nuanced view of his philosophy of language, nonetheless exemplifies the scholarly habit of suggesting that words are impediments to “advancement”:

It is the ambiguity of language that proves the most formidable obstacle to the progress of the new learning. Bacon’s theory of the philosophical style evolves gradually to form a counterattack which will minimize the power of words over man’s understanding, imagination, and affections. (60)

On the question of the literary, the common wisdom misses the mark: Bacon disparages several specific forms of rhetoric, including some which have recently received special attention in literary studies, but he promotes and performs a mode of writing that is no less “literary” than those he rejects.⁶⁰ Just as scholars depict Bacon as a prophet of instrumental reason rather than human weakness,⁶¹ they see him as a philosopher of things rather than words, and thus as an

boundaries of “literature” as a discrete category, but simply to refer loosely to forms of writing that are associated with pleasure and pedagogy.

⁶⁰ See Cave’s classic account of *copia* for a particularly illuminating discussion of the French Renaissance—one that implicitly sheds light on the case of England as well.

⁶¹ See Chapter 1, especially the Introduction and Section IV, for my position on Bacon’s interest in “instrumental reason.”

early champion of scientism rather than a theorist of literary experimentalism. My case for Bacon's investment in the latter terms in these oppositions (human weakness, words, literary experimentalism) creates a context within which the aims of Boyle's *Reflections* come more fully into view.

Bacon's literary theory is best understood as a critique of literary specificity; for this reason, it actually constitutes a defense of exactly the sort of literary "ambiguity" Stephens claims is under "attack"—though in the etymological sense of "driving hither and thither," as opposed to the term's more typical suggestion of mere confusion or uncertainty. For Bacon, as for Montaigne, language obstructs learning when it turns in upon itself: an interest in language *apart from other phenomena* shrouds the natural world in illusory appearances—verbal artifacts that have lost their connection to the non-linguistic.⁶² A literary form that moves between persons and things, between language and its others—a form that lives a worldly life like the persons and things it communicates—is a resource the natural philosopher cannot do without.

Bacon's critique is aimed at a specific conception of the literary—the one that Renaissance literary figures most often endorsed, even if it did not provide an adequate account of their own literary compositions. Philip Sidney's description of poetry as a "medicine of cherries" in *An Apologie for Poetrie* (1595) is a compressed version of this widely disseminated Horatian metaphor—one that can only prove unsatisfactory to Bacon's natural philosophy (139).⁶³ A more descriptive version of this metaphor, which clarifies the conceptual distinctions upon which it rests, can be found in Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1581):

...e che 'l vero, condito in molli versi,
i piú schivi allettando ha persuaso.
Cosí a l'egro fanciul porgiamo aspersi
di soavi licor gli orli del vaso:
succhi amari ingannato intanto ei beve,
e da l'inganno suo vita riceve. (I, 3)

...the truth in fluent verses hidden has by its charm persuaded the most froward.
So we present to the feverish child the rim of the glass sprinkled over with sweet
liquids: he drinks deceived the bitter medicine and from his deception receives
life. (I, 3)

Sidney and Tasso's apologies for poetry rely on fixed oppositions between teacher and student, as well as between exteriority and interiority (between sugary pleasure and the underlying medicinal bitterness "sweet liquids" and "cherries" cover up). The author (or perhaps his surrogate, the text) teaches the reader a lesson, and poetic utterances or "molli versi" comprise a pedagogical technique: readers who would not endure the hardship of reading philosophy are persuaded ("persuaso") to do so when it generates pleasure.

Although Sidney, Tasso, and many other sixteenth- and seventeenth-century poets and literary theorists who draw upon these metaphors nonetheless generate fictions that trouble the

⁶² See my discussion of Montaigne in Chapter 1, Section III.

⁶³ See Eden ("Hermeneutics") for a concise account of the hermeneutic procedures this metaphor implies.

neat assimilation of the literary to the pedagogical, it is rare to find, at the turn of the seventeenth century, the sort of outright rejection of this tradition one discovers in Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* (1605).⁶⁴ Bacon's discussion of "copie" or *copia* clarifies his skepticism about the isolation of pleasure from function—what might also be thought of as the neat separation of form and content:

So that these four causes concurring, the admiration of ancient authors, the hate of the schoolmen, the exact study of languages, and the efficacy of preaching, did bring in an affectionate study of eloquence and copie of speech, which then began to flourish. This grew speedily to an excess; for men began to hunt more after words than matter; and more after the choiceness of the phrase, and the round and clean composition of the sentence, and the sweet falling of the clauses, and the varying illustration of their works with tropes and figures, than after the weight of the matter, worth of subject, soundness of argument, life of invention, or depth of judgment" (139)

Bacon the great adversary of scholasticism reveals himself a no less effective adversary of scholasticism's adversaries. Protestant Humanism frustrates Bacon because of its reverence for language, which eclipses the "subject" it treats, the "argument" it presents, the "invention" it displays, and the "judgment" it makes. "Eloquence and copie of speech" are extensions of rhetorical pedagogy: as a practice of rhetorical proliferation in which myriad forms of speech are generated irrespective of any specific occasion, *copia* stabilizes the content of an utterance and treats verbal form as a container for delivering that content; it manufactures containers so that the most appealing and effective might be chosen. To recall Vickers' argument, this is not the case if *copia verborum* and *copia rerum* are simultaneously cultivated, although I would suggest that such dual cultivation remains decidedly dual. The problem here is not only with the affirmation of a distinction between form and content (which insulates "content" from revision and contestation, since it is simply handed down in the appropriate "form"), but also with an overinvestment in form to the exclusion of content: it is as if the physician responsible for Sidney's "medicine of cherries" were so concerned with developing new, appealing flavors that he forgot to ensure the medicine's therapeutic function.

Bacon's adjectives indicate the specific kind of linguistic artifact that troubles him: "choice," "round," and "clean" suggest values of self-enclosed unity and agreeability, while "sweet" ties those values to the Horatian metaphor. The costs of this conception of language are high; nothing as simple as "fact" is obscured by *copia*: "weight," "worth," "soundness," "life," and "depth" suggest a range of human faculties including evaluation, persuasion, and insight. Bacon's reference to "invention" calls to mind the humanist deployment of *topoi*—the selection of preexistent rhetorical devices—and thus evokes exactly the sort of discourse on which he casts his skeptical eye, although this "invention" is explicitly imbued with "life." Perhaps modern scholarship paints Bacon as an antagonist of literature because the literary values he rejects are similar to those still in currency. Paradis' attempt to separate "science" and "literature" in Boyle's work on the basis of his putatively anti-literary Baconianism is a good example: "The idea that facts can be discovered, sorted, and recombined to contribute to the Baconian model of

⁶⁴ Bacon also repeats these metaphors, but the purpose of this discussion is to show that he displaces and revises them.

the world subverts the profound literary instinct to achieve unity and closure with each utterance” (78). My argument suggests that “unity and closure” are not “instinct[ive]” to literary writers in all times and places; Bacon favors a form of literary experimentalism that evades those rhetorical effects.

The importance of words to Bacon’s natural philosophy is especially apparent in his account of the “distemper[s] of learning” that impede the development of the sciences (139). The “first distemper of learning,” according to Bacon, is exemplified by “men [who] study words and not matter” (139). Yet Bacon is not so naive as to believe that language can simply be rendered crystal clear, thereby banishing problems of mediation. While describing the second “distemper” of learning, the study of “vain matter,” Bacon writes that St. Paul identifies “two marks and badges of suspected and falsified science; the one, the novelty and strangeness of terms; the other the strictness of positions, which of necessity doth induce oppositions, and so questions and altercations” (140). He continues with the following claim, which seems to display exactly the deficiency it scolds other writers for exhibiting:

Surely, like as many substances in nature which are solid do putrefy and corrupt into worms, so it is the property of good and sound knowledge to putrefy and dissolve into a number of subtile, idle, unwholesome, and (as I may term them) vermiculate questions, which have indeed a kind of quickness and life of spirit, but no soundness of matter or goodness of quality. (140)

Though Bacon claims to be passing from the question of “words” to the question of “matter,” he begins that discussion by rejecting “the novelty or strangeness of terms.” Words and matter, it seems, are not as neatly separable as Bacon at first suggests. More interesting than this, however, is Bacon’s decision to call the reader’s attention to his own neologism, “vermiculate,” in the very same passage in which he ridicules the scholastic predilection for “novelty and strangeness of terms.” By saying, “as I may term them,” he ensures that the reader notices his own “strange” coinage, making the very name of the problem—the “wormlikeness” of “strange” philosophical language—an instance of that problem. This is an extension of Montaigne’s vocabulary of “swarming commentaries” (“fourmille de commentaires”), but it guarantees that the reader considers the complaint in the subtlest of registers: needless coinage is obscurantist, but not every coinage is needless. Sometimes the matter in question demands a distortion of conventional language.

When Bacon seems to celebrate action over discussion, he actually endorses the view that action and discussion are interdependent—that cordoning language off from events in which it necessarily figures can only deprive it of its utility:

We will begin therefore with the precept, according to the ancient opinion, that the sinews of wisdom are slowness of belief and distrust; that more trust be given to countenances and deeds than to words; and in words, rather to sudden passages and surprised words, than to set and purposed words. (273)

“Countenances and deeds” are more “trust[worthy]” than “words,” but such an observation only makes sense if those “countenances and deeds” are understood as evidence of some linguistic claim: that someone thinks something, feels something, or will behave in some particular way. An act only establishes “trust” if it conforms to an expectation generated by intention or belief.

The more language responds to the rush of events, Bacon suggests, the more valuable it is; such a claim says nothing about the value of language in general, but instead about its spontaneity. Moreover, “trust” is only granted to non-linguistic events when they bear out the promises of language—when, one might say, events are activated by language the way language, when it earns our trust, is activated by events.

Bacon’s explicit discussion of poetry seeks to integrate literary language with other “part[s] of learning”; it seems to denigrate literary art only to suggest once again that it redeems itself by way of its relation to the non-literary. Bacon writes:

In this third part of learning, which is poesy, I can report no deficiency. For being as a plant that cometh of the lust of the earth, without a formal seed, it hath sprung up and spread abroad more than any other kind. But to ascribe unto it that which is due; for the expressing of affections, passions, corruptions, and customs, we are beholding to poets more than to the philosophers’ works; and for wit and eloquence not much less than to orators’ harangues. But it is not good to stay too long in the theatre. Let us now pass on to the judicial place or palace of the mind, which we are to approach and view with more reverence and attention. (188)

Here, poetry is an example of the spontaneous form of speech Bacon favors in the passage quoted on the previous page, springing forth spontaneously and rhizomatically—from “the lust of the earth, without a formal seed.” And yet Bacon seems to trivialize poetry, granting it “that which is due” but no more, assuring the reader that “it is not good to stay too long in the theatre,” and inviting her to “pass on” to more serious matters. The next sentence, however, continues in the same metaphorical register that structures Bacon’s poetic commentary on poetry, drawing on pastoral images like the one that pictures poetry as a sort of wild undergrowth—and even repeating the rhetoric of “springing up” in its description of the production of “knowledge,” identifying it with the poetic realm from which it is supposedly distinguished. Bacon’s hortatory imperative is only that—a command both writer and reader fail to follow: “The knowledge of man is as the waters, some descending from above, and some springing from beneath; the one informed by the light of nature, the other inspired by divine revelation” (189). Bacon and his audience have not passed out of the theater; by continuing in the same metaphorical vein that defined the “theatre” of Bacon’s discussion of poetics, he has suggested that such departures are only apparent. Bacon casts the literary as a mode of relation to the non-literary, rather than an autonomous realm of activity. Bacon favors the theater of the world over the theater—but he indicates that instances of the latter might also be examples of the former.

Bacon’s predilection for the first person plural (“We will begin therefore...”; “Let us now pass on...”) is a symptom of a more general impulse to level the relationship between writer and reader—to enlist the reader in a collective project rather than teach her a lesson by feeding her a “medicine of cherries.” Bacon achieves this effect through a language that performs the disposition of “nonchalance” he promotes and performs; for Bacon, natural philosophical writing should adopt the ever-preliminary, casual, exploratory tone of experimental observation.⁶⁵ Bacon writes, “...knowledge that is delivered as a thread to be spun on, ought to be delivered and intimated, if it were possible, in the same method wherein it was invented, and so is it possible of knowledge induced” (233-4). “Delivered” in the same form in which it is “invented,” Baconian

⁶⁵ See Chapter 1, Section IV.

language suggests an equation between the experience of the writer and the reader. One could take almost all the characteristics of Baconian (and Montaignian) style as attempts to confirm this equation by creating a sense of generative preliminariness: a propensity to wander, a mode of citation that evades authority, and a tendency to redeploy rather than rule out objects of critique (like the metaphor of the spider's silk, which first suggests the tangled reasoning of the scholastics, but is here refigured as "thread to be spun on").⁶⁶

Bacon's taste for aphorism is an especially good example of this strategy, and one that links Baconian style with his theory of affect. "Aphorisms," Bacon writes, "representing a knowledge broken, do invite men to enquire farther; whereas Methods, carrying the shew of a total, do secure men, as if they were at furthest" (235). Of course they are not "at furthest," which makes aphorism a salutary mode of writing for the inquisitive mind, as Brian Vickers suggests (67). But aphorism, because it is a generic analogue of Baconian "wonder," which is also described as "knowledge broken," typifies the momentariness at the heart of my discussion in the previous chapter: it concatenates the desire for and gratification of knowledge into a single moment—the aphorism which delivers knowledge and the wonder which makes it an object of desire in the first place (125). Aphorism is a mode of writing that simultaneously *preserves the incompleteness* and *offers up the fruits* of philosophical inquiry. It ensures that neither writer nor reader qualifies as a possessor of knowledge; both remain in a mode of provisional exploration induced by Bacon's carelessness and its formal corollaries.

I have suggested that Bacon's literary theory is a rejection of the Horatian logic of poetic pedagogy; I now wish to show that Bacon offers a revision of the Horatian metaphor itself, and that Boyle gives the same metaphor a subsequent modification. Boyle's repetition of Bacon's gesture is a good point of departure for understanding his inheritance of Baconian literary theory. Both Bacon and Boyle signal their abandonment of the distinction between sweet (but frivolous) outside and bitter (but morally beneficial) inside by reformulating the image of delectable therapeutics. Horkheimer and Adorno—who have appeared in my argument mainly to serve as foils, given their unsympathetic mischaracterization of Bacon's vision of "advancement"—provide a useful point of departure for my account of the experimentalist revision of the Horatian metaphor.⁶⁷ Both Bacon and Boyle derive images of edible flowers from the Horatian tradition, undermining the separation of frivolous exteriority and nutritive or therapeutic interiority by describing an object that hovers somewhere between these two poles. Responding to the Lotus Eaters episode in Homer's *Odyssey*, Adorno and Horkheimer write:

The eating of flowers, as is still customary during dessert in the East and is known to European children from baking with rosewater and from candied violets, bears the promise of a state in which the reproduction of life is independent of conscious self-preservation, the bliss of satiety uncoupled from the utility of planned nutrition. (50)

Though Horkheimer and Adorno's observation is underdeveloped and Orientalizing (surely the "eating of flowers" is as "Western" as it is "Eastern," as the remark about "European children" admits, and the location of this practice in "the East" draws on a conventional image repertoire

⁶⁶ See Chapter 1, Sections III and IV, for an extended commentary on this metaphor.

⁶⁷ See the Introduction to Chapter 1 for my critique of Horkheimer and Adorno.

of oriental voluptuousness and excess), it suggestively interprets the image of the edible flower as an emblem of the blurring of practicality and luxury. In this account, eating “candied violets” actually counts as a means to the preservation of health: it might seem like mere extravagance—“the bliss of satiety uncoupled from the utility of planned nutrition”—but it facilitates the “reproduction of life.”

Bacon and Boyle share this interest in the intermingling of delectation and usefulness—as distinct from the neat separation of these qualities in classical and Renaissance images of a merely superficial enjoyment that masks a more substantial utility. Responding to astrology and other sciences of human temperament, Bacon makes use of the image of edible flowers in an injunction to make good on human knowledge:

For the distinctions [in human complexion] are found (many of them) [in discourses like astrology], but we conclude no precepts upon them; wherein our fault is the greater, because both history, poesy, and daily experience are as goodly fields where these observations grow; whereof we make a few posies to hold in our hands, but no man bringeth them to the confectionary, that receipts might be made of them for use of life. (258)

Bacon’s interest here is untapped potential, but such potential lies in “posies”; to make good on such potential would be to “bring” those “posies” to the “confectionary.” Unlike the image of the “medicine of cherries,” pleasure is not superadded to usefulness but is instead a resource out of which usefulness might be drawn. Interestingly, to make good on such promise is the work of the “confectionary”—in early modernity, a term that might suggest either the production of merely delectable confections or of medicinal ones (“confection,”). In either the case, the goal is similar to the one singled out by Horkheimer and Adorno: “the use of life,” like the “reproduction of life,” suggests the preservation and enhancement of human existence. Bacon’s reference to “posies”—bouquets of underdeveloped knowledge—and “poesy” in the same breath indicates that poetics is at issue in his discussion of merely pleasurable but stunted knowledge. These bouquets are only delectable trifles, and yet the solution to that problem might be for the “confectionary” to render them delectable—and not necessarily medicinal as well. To offer a metaphor of my own, Bacon might have said that one should harvest these observations and bake them into bread; instead he chooses to make “use of life” follow from the plucking of “posies.” The figure makes utility derive from pleasure, rather than simply favoring the former over the latter, or, following the logic of the “medicine of cherries,” neatly enclosing one within the other.

Boyle’s adaptation of this image in the *Reflections* seems Horatian at first, but turns out to radicalize Bacon’s objections to that tradition. The first reflection in Section V, “Upon the sight of N. N. making Syrup of Violets,” begins with an allusion to the same tension between frivolity and utility: “One that did not know the Medicinal Vertues of Violets,” Boyle writes, “and were not acquainted with the Charitable Intentions of the skillful person, that is making a Syrup of them, would think him a very great Friend to *Epicurism*: For his Employment seems wholly design’d to gratifie the senses” (139). He goes on to defend the seemingly trivial in a meandering complex-compound sentence that strings together a long series of independent and subordinated clauses as if to prove that what seems excessive need not be so understood:

The things he deals with are Flowers and Sugar, and of them he is solicitous to make a Composition that may delight more than one or two Senses; For in One

Syrup he endeavors to please the Eye, by the loveliness of the Colour; the Nose, by the perfume of the Scent; the Taste, by as much sweetness as Sugar can impart. But he that knowing that Violets, though they please the Palate can purge the Body, and notwithstanding their good smell, can expel bad humours, knows also that the Preparer of these fragrant Plants, in making their Juice into a Syrup, is careful to make it acceptable, that its pleasantness might recommend it, and invite ev'n those to prove its Vertues, who had rather continue sick, than make a Trial of a disgusting Remedy; will not blame his Curiosity, but commend his prudent Charity; since he doubly obliges a Patient, that not onely presents him Remedies, but presents him Allurements to make use of them. (139-40)

Boyle's underlying claim is the same as the one conveyed by the Horatian metaphor, though here the curative comestible is literal; it is not a metaphor for rhetoric or poetry—not yet. But pleasure's alibi is less insistent: whereas Sidney and Tasso are emphatic about the usefulness of pleasure, underlining its status as a mere encouragement to self-preservation, Boyle's near-identical argument is more sympathetic to experiences of pleasure in their own right, as his own beautifully self-indulgent prose seems to suggest. If the patient is actually “doubly oblig[e]d,” then “Allurements” are taken seriously as benefits: they are not simply the means to the end of bodily health. In Tasso's metaphor, the child is “deceived” (“ingannato”): the unwilling have to be induced to heal themselves—but here the sweetness of medicine is a surplus benefit, the pleasure of its ingestion less thoroughly explained away by its therapeutic function.

Boyle's ensuing reflection—the drawing of a lesson from the observation of the confectioner's art—surpasses Bacon in its departure from tradition, hyperbolizing his worldly literary theory by generalizing it to encompass all manner of linguistic activity. Boyle repeats Bacon's interest in the intermingling of (literary) pleasure and utility, but he extends an astonishing benefit of the doubt to *all* seemingly trivial activities in the belief that they hold the promise of unexpected benefits. This gesture comes close to returning to the logic of *copia*—perhaps even the cultivation of *copia verborum* apart from *copia rerum*—but it follows surprisingly from Baconian literary theory: Boyle celebrates the proliferation of superficial and pleasurable linguistic exercises on the basis of the vague promise of functionality they offer. Immediately after the passage on violets quoted above, Boyle writes:

If I see a person that is Learned and Eloquent, as well as Pious, busied about giving his Sermons, or other devout Composures, the Ornaments and Advantages which Learning or Wit do naturally confer upon those productions of the Tongue, or Pen, wherein they are plentifully and judiciously employ'd; I will not be forward to condemn him of a mis-expen[n]ce of his Time or Talents; *whether* they be laid out upon Speculative Notions in Theology, *or* upon Critical Inquiries into Obsolete Rites, *or* Disputable Etymologies; *or* upon Philosophical Disquisitions or Experiments; *or* upon the florid Embellishments of Language; *or* (in short) upon some such other thing as seems extrinsecal to the Doctrine that is according to Godliness, and seems not to have any direct tendency to the promoting of Piety and the kindling of Devotion. For I consider, that as God hath made man subject to several wants, and hath both given him several allowable appetites, and endowed him with various faculties and abilities to gratifie them; so a man's pen

may be very warrantably and usefully employ'd, though it be not directly so, to teach a Theological Truth, or incite the Reader's Zeal. (140-141)

If the medicinal quality of a "Syrup of Violets" is at first obscured by its seeming frivolity, Boyle's argument runs, *all manner* of pleasurable speech and writing need to be encouraged on the principle that they too bear the promise of unforeseeable gain. Boyle's meditation undermines the distinction between surface and depth upon which Horatian metaphors depend: what "seems extrinsecal" really does only seem that way. Like Bacon, Boyle uses a floral metaphor for linguistic ornament, speaking of "*florid* Embellishments of Language" in the midst of a discussion of edible flowers, and repeats the suggestion that the task at hand is to take those flowers "to the confectionary"—or perhaps only to keep them around, in the hope that some confectioner will find a use for them (*italics mine*).

Boyle makes the Baconian suggestion that the benefits of "Sermon"-writing and all "devout Composures" reside in their capacity for "Charitable...Remedies" to humankind's afflictions, and he adopts a rhetoric of "use[ful] employ[ment]" to justify those activities. Whereas Bacon seems actually to distinguish between forms of writing that fail to produce such "Remedies," Boyle generalizes a Baconian understanding of the literary to all "devout Composures," a category that comes to encompass even the profane (since it includes that which "seems extrinsecal to the Doctrine that is according to Godliness"). Moreover—and I take up this issue in the next section—the "warrantable" status of writing rests on the reader's capacity to receive no less than the writer's capacity to give: writing holds the power to "teach a Theological Truth, or incite the Reader's Zeal"—to perform an act of devotion or induce the reader to perform such an act.

III. Easy Feelings: Affect without Effort in the *Reflections*

The gentle hedonism of Boyle's *Reflections* encourages an exploratory indulgence in meditation, which raises the question of whether such an engagement actually generates enjoyment; Boyle's project rests on the claim that it does. I suggest that the figures of effortless labor that emerge from this textual experiment reveal the rhetorical problems, as well as the epistemological advantages, of Baconian pleasure. Boyle is most interested in the idea that the pleasure of carelessness is a relationship to otherness: objects of reflection induce emotional effortlessness, freeing the self from the burden of achieving such a state on its own. Boyle describes his literary practice as "an innocent sort of Necromancy" that "make[s], not the Stars onely, but all the Creatures of Nature, and the various occurrences that can fall under our notice, conspire to inrich us with Instructions they never meant us" (21). He seems to animate the inert, yet his emphasis falls on the accidental events that "fall under our notice," and he makes a joke of agency by "mak[ing]" the world "conspire to inrich us." By making agency a shared responsibility between subjects and objects, Boyle makes discursive pleasure a spontaneous experience rather than a strenuous practice, a happy fact rather than a state of affairs for which the self bears responsibility.

Just before the prefatory "Discourse Touching Occasional Meditations" gives way to the meditations themselves, Boyle compares his "way of thinking," defined by the soul's capacity "to spiritualize all the Objects and Accidents that occur to her," to the pleasurable labor of the honeybee—a Senecan metaphor for gathering arguments for rhetorical purposes, and one taken up by Bacon in *The New Organon* to describe the sort of philosophy that digests and transforms

what it discovers in the world rather than clinging too closely to the “rational” or to the “experimental.” Boyle’s use of the metaphor clarifies the logical confusions of casual indifference:

It must surely afford a great deal of satisfaction to an Ingenious and Devout person, to be able to make the world both his Library and his Oratory. And which way soever he turns his eyes (not onely upon unobvious things, but even upon the most familiar ones) to behold something that instructs, or that delights him. And to find that almost every object that presents it self to his notice, presents also good Thoughts to his Mind, to be gather’d with as much Innocency and Pleasure, and with as little prejudice to the things that afford them, as Honey is gather’d by the industrious Bee from the differing Flowers she meets with in her way. (78)

This is a perfect example of Boyle’s generalization of literary pleasure: “the world” is rendered textual in the form of a “Library” and an “Oratory,” and is said to “instruct, or...delight” in good Horatian fashion. Boyle describes the practice of reflection as an experience of thoroughgoing pleasure—a suggestion that departs from the Horatian conception of the literary as the superaddition of pleasure to the rigors of study. The image of the bee ontologizes the pleasure of reflection: one does not imagine a bee training itself to enjoy gathering nectar or having to be seduced into such a practice; its enjoyment is its birthright. Interestingly, however, this passage emerges from an account of self-discipline. Boyle writes:

The custom of making Occasional Reflections may insensibly, and by unperceiv’d degrees, work the Soul to a certain frame, or temper, which may not improperly be called Heavenly Mindedness, whereby she acquires an aptitude and disposition to make pious Reflections upon almost every Occurrence... (77)

If the soul is beelike, it should not have to be “work[ed]”—even if such self-discipline is rendered palatable by the claim that it happens “insensibly, and by unperceiv’d degrees.” Albeit in a very different context, this passage rehearses the tension between one who casually gulps water from the brim of his hat and one who strains to achieve carelessness about the possessions over which he anxiously keeps watch. Perhaps Boyle seeks to ameliorate this problem with his inaccurate remark that “Honey is gather’d...from the differing Flowers,” which short-circuits the production of honey from nectar, locating the eventual fruits of production in the initial stage of gathering raw materials. The impulse to collapse the achievement of effortlessness together with the labor with which it must be cultivated follows logically from the text’s rhetorical occasion: a project that holds up images of pleasurable states of feeling as enticements to reflection should not mitigate their power by describing them as hard won.

As I have suggested, however, the problem is stickier than this: even setting aside the rhetorical problem of inducing readers to engage in meditation, the logic of self-discipline threatens to make carelessness impossible. Experimentalist concern with the problem of “hardness of heart,” which I take up at length in Chapter Four, is evinced by Boyle’s reflections on his journey along the Thames. These reflections explore the undesirable outcome of an indifference predicated on Stoic discipline. Boyle notices that the river, “in various Windings and Meanders” seems “wantonly to fly, and to pursue itself,” and yet its effects on the land and its inhabitants are beneficial: it “imparts Fertility and Plenty” and “helps to bring us Home” from

“the Remoter parts of the World, and the Indies themselves, either East or West” (50-51). Lindamor transforms this observation into a meditation on the capacity of the passions to benefit humankind in spite of their seeming unruliness:

Me-thinks... That amongst other *good things*, wherewith this River furnish us, it may supply us with a good Argument against those Modern Stoicks, who are wont, with more Eloquence than Reason, to Declaim against the Passions, and would fain perswade *Others*, (for I doubt *whether* they be so perswaded themselves) That the Mind ought to deal with its Affections, as *Pharaoh* would have dealt with the *Jews-Males*, whom he thought it *wise to Destroy*, least they might, one Day, grow up into a condition to Revolt from him. But, because the Passions are (sometimes) Mutinous, to wish an Apathy, is as unkind to us, as it would be to our Country, To wish we had no Rivers, because (sometimes) they do Mischief, when great or suddain Rain swells them above *their Banks*. (51)

An exaggerated fear of disorder encourages the self-destructive extirpation of the passions. Lindamor’s violent analogy can only send ripples through the peaceful waterway on which the reader travels, its incongruity catching her attention. And this is the exact effect the passage defends: passions, even dangerous ones, need to be granted their freedom. Their capacity to enrich—to “fertil[ize]” and to bring the self into contact with the foreign (“the Indies themselves”)—outweighs their potential to disrupt. It is no accident that Lindamor alludes to Pharaoh’s enslavement of the Jews—not only because the preemptive slaughter of Jewish children functions as a metaphor for the paranoiac destruction of the passions, but also because the Exodus story turns on the repeated hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. He is an exemplar of insensitivity.

Eusebius’s response to Lindamor’s reflection demonstrates the difficulties of imagining a state of muted feeling that neither capitulates to the passions nor violently represses them—that is neither in their thrall nor shielded by self-discipline. He offers an enigmatic analogy that strikes a compromise between affective freedom and control:

When I consider... *That* of the Immaculate and Divine *Lamb* himself, ‘tis recorded in the Gospel, That *He Look’d round about, upon certain Jews, with Indignation, being griev’d for the Hardness of their Hearts*; So that two Passions are ascrib’d to *Christ himself* in one Verse: And when I consider too, the Indifferency, (and consequently the Innocence) of Passions *in their own Nature*, and the Use that Wise and Virtuous Persons may make of them, I cannot think we ought to throw away (or so much as wish away) those Instruments of Piety, which God and Nature has put into our Hands: But am very *well content* we should retain them, upon such conditions as *Abraham* did, *Those Domesticks he bought with his Money*, whom the Scripture tells us, *He both Circumcis’d, and kept as Servants*. (51-52)

Here, “Hardness of...Heart” is attributed to “certain Jews.” The ministry of Christ is understood as an invitation to experience the passions. Lindamor is less interested in the fact that Christ disapproves of “Hardness of...Heart” than he is in the fact that the bible attributes passionate feeling to Christ himself: “two Passions...in one Verse.” Since the passions in question,

“Indignation” and “grief,” are not those typically associated with “Heavenly Mindedness,” the gospel seems to suggest a state of generalized softness of heart. But where the first half of this passage extends an invitation to the passions, the second half sets limits on that hospitality. The passions are compared to “Domesticks” of Abraham, whom he “both Circumcis’d, and kept as Servants.” Coming immediately after the commentary on Pharaoh, this passage draws an implicit contrast between slavery, predicated on foreignness, and servitude, predicated on inclusion. Circumcision suggests the incorporation of servants in the Hebrew community rather than mere subjection to its power. But it is an uneasy compromise: an attempt to render the passions safe without exercising exaggerated power over them. With respect to Pharaoh’s enslavement of the Jews and his genocidal paranoia, this is a gesture of welcome. In comparison to the celebratory image of free-flowing rivers that fertilize the land and bring different populations into contact with each other, it is a figure of self-control.

Boyle ultimately eludes this difficulty by giving responsibility for carelessness away to “occasions.” Throughout this study of experimentalist affect, I have argued that carelessness can be understood as a form of receptivity; here, Boyle suggests that such careless receptivity is encouraged by the chance observation of unexpected occurrences. This point is implicit in many of the other examples of casual indifference that concern me in these pages: Bacon’s pivotal description of a state in which “appetite and satisfaction are perpetually interchangeable,” for instance, belongs specifically to the experience of “learning,” so that such a mode of feeling only emerges through engagement with objects of study. Boyle is particularly focused on the derivation of muted feeling from the observation of the exterior world—perhaps, as I have suggested, because he fixes his gaze on the problem of the arduousness of carelessness. If casual indifference is redoubled by an inquisitive engagement with objects—if “Necromancy” grants objects the power to induce calm in those who observe them—then Boyle’s problem is solved.

The causal logic of the experience of “occasional reflection” is circular but coherent: one can engage in a practice of meditation (making observations in thought and in writing) without having achieved “heavenly mindedness”—one can, that is, be careless about carelessness—and one can trust that a variety of encounters with contingent situations can induce the sort of casual indifference that redoubles receptivity and makes it increasingly habitual. In this way, the observer’s tranquility is generated by the objects of her gaze.

The “Discourse Touching Occasional Meditations” clarifies this interrelation of subject and object, and it charts a course from the seeming difficulty of meditation to the ease of its achievement. Boyle anticipates that “it may be objected against the pleasantness of the Mental Exercise I have been speaking of, That to make Occasional Meditations is a work too difficult to be delightful,” but counters that objection by asserting that “the difficulties imagin’d in the practice I am treating of, seem to arise, not so much from the nature of the thing it self, as from some prejudices and misapprehensions that are entertain’d about it” (22, 23). The “difficulty” that would undermine the “pleasantness” of meditation is simply a “misapprehension,” which means the actual practice of meditation is “delightful.” It does not fall to the meditator to render her experience pleasant; it already is, and only delusion makes it seem otherwise. This claim becomes easier to understand when, later in the same passage, Boyle writes: “In some cases, the Occasion is not so much the Theme of the Meditation, as the Rise” (24). The “Occasion,” which might be understood as a specific conjunction of subject and object, brings reflection about, making it a product of circumstance rather than a labor of the self. Boyle does not choose a “Theme” on which to reflect, but is moved by the “Occasion” itself to reflect upon it. If there is an agent in this operation, it is the domain of “objects,” but one that can no longer be cordoned

off from the realm of “subjects,” and it is in this sense that the practice of meditation earns the name “necromancy.”

IV. “Suppleness” and the Agency of “Chance”

At every turn, the *Reflections* proclaims the importance of “chance”—a term that comes to name the unpredictable agency of non-subjective forces. Though Boyle does not explicitly define or thematize this term, its importance is hard to miss. Though the word “chance” only appears casually, it does so with a frequency that invites speculation. (At this stage in my discussion, the importance of the seemingly casual should come as no surprise.) The following list is only a representative sample: “Whatever chanc’d to come in my way”; “my Horse had but chanc’d to stumble”; “I chanced to stop”; “I chanc’d to look”; “chancing to tread on a place, where the course of the Water had worn off the Bank”; “chancing to express a curiosity”; and so on (1, 28, 13, 33, 47, 95). Frequently, “chance” names the unpredictable agency by which events take place, presiding quietly over the incidents that occasion Boyle’s meditations. As a verb, “chance” is an action word—a way for an event to transpire. Recall Boyle’s reluctance to describe “something by way of Method,” given the possibility that he “should at this time be hinder’d from treating” it by some unnamed interruption, and his assurance that he will eventually offer that absent description, but only “if it prove convenient” (3). I propose that the primacy of the contingent event in the *Reflections* explains both Boyle’s exaggerated awareness of the possibility that he might be “hinder’d” from his plans and the singling out of “Method” for indefinite postponement, since the latter seeks to obviate “chance.”

What Boyle calls “Suppleness of Style” is an attempt to write in accordance with unpredictability (38). It explains the failure of the *Reflections* to resemble any of the texts with which it seems at first to share a genre. Boyle’s project seems to follow the pattern of Bishop Joseph Hall’s *Occasionall Meditations* (1630), and yet his alternation between the term “meditation” (Hall’s term) and “reflection” suggests a deviation from that precedent.⁶⁸ Indeed, one of the moments in which Boyle is most explicit about his wish for writing to follow from unpredictable “occasions” is also a moment in which he distinguishes his project from Hall’s. To pick up again from a passage I left off quoting above:

In some cases, the Occasion is not so much the Theme of the Meditation, as the Rise. For my part, I am so little scrupulous in this matter, that I would not confine Occasional Meditations to Divinity it self, though that be a very comprehensive Subject, but am ready to allow mens thoughts to expatiate much further, and to make of the Objects they contemplate not only a Theological and a Moral, but also a Political, an Oeconomical, or even a Physical use. (24)

“Confin[ing] Occasional Meditations to Divinity” is Hall’s project, one from which Boyle here distinguishes his own. He mentions “Physical use” as a function “occasional reflections” might “even” include as if such “use[s]” were not in fact central to Boyle’s project—a typically experimentalist gesture, which introduces a matter of crucial importance by way of an intimation

⁶⁸ Boyle’s sister, Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick, wrote a series of *Occasional Meditations* that more closely approximates Hall.

of carelessness.⁶⁹ He also suggests that “Divinity” is “a very comprehensive Subject,” but not sufficiently so, if one is truly to allow “the Occasion” to give “Rise” to the “Meditation,” though the cumulative effect of the text, with its persistent language of devotion, is to render “Divinity” “comprehensive” enough to include all the “use[s]” it is here held to exclude. “Suppleness” renders such categorical divisions perennially provisional. And “expatiate” is the perfect word to describe this activity, suggesting the free movement of wandering footsteps, as well as the figurative meandering of thought and descriptive language.

Boyle’s reference to “scrupulousness” is also worthy of notice: it disorients us by abandoning a familiar vocabulary of concern and disregard. Boyle is emphatic about how “[un]scrupulous” he is—taking meticulous care, one might say, to point out how *little* he cares what sort of incident or observation occasions meditation. In this way, he suggests that precise attention might not be incompatible with nonchalance—that *intellectual* care might correspond with *emotional* carelessness, and that casual indifference might accommodate the sorts of activity one tends to associate with the rigorously trained eye of the methodical observer.

Boyle describes the state of heightened receptivity that corresponds with the practice of meditation by affirming the radical inclusiveness of his attention, echoing the passage that most emphatically distinguishes his project from Hall’s:

Not to mention now that I shall advertise you anon, that there is no necessity of confining occasional meditations, to matters, Devout, or Theological, I shall only represent, that, since we know not, before we have considered the particular Objects that occur to us, which of them will, and which of them will not, afford us the subject of an Occasional Reflection, the mind will, after a while, be engag’d to a general and habitual attention, relating to the Objects that present themselves to it. (29)

Here it is “Occasional Reflection” that holds the power to bring the “mind” into a state of “general and habitual attention,” but of course, in answer to the threat of disciplined hardness and insensitivity, the agents of such cultivation are “particular Objects” rather than the labors of the self. An awareness of objects is keyed to the practice of reflection, and it is up to the “Objects that present themselves to the [mind]” to induce a state of radical openness to whatever comes to pass. It is worth noting that writing and observing are coordinated—that Boyle does not indulge in a fantasy of pristine perception, but places his trust in a mode of mediation (writing occasional reflections) that grants access to the exterior world by virtue of its pliancy to unpredictable occurrences. It is in this sense that one should understand Boyle’s assertion that “we know not...which of them [the particular objects that occur to us] will, and which of them will not, afford us the subject of an Occasional Reflection.”

For Boyle, then, style is a form of receptivity. It is for this reason that he can write, “I am more beholden to my Occasional Reflections, than they are to me” (7). The writing exercise grants him access to experiences and insights of which he would otherwise remain incapable. The broadening and diversification of style is a broadening and diversification of experience—of the receptivity that defines experience. Thus Boyle writes:

⁶⁹ See my discussion of paralepsis in Chapter 3, Section II.

When a man treats of familiar, or of solemn Subjects, he is so much assisted by the received phrases and manners of speaking, that are wont to be imploi'd about them, that being seldome at a loss for convenient expressions, his Wit is seldome distress'd how to furnish him with words fit for his turn. But the Subjects that invite Occasional Reflections, are so various, and uncommon, and oftentimes so odd, that, to accommodate ones Discourse to them, the vulgar and receiv'd forms of Speech will afford him but little assistance, and to come off any thing well, he must exercise his Invention, and put it upon coining various and new Expressions, to sute that variety of unfamiliar Subjects, and of Occasions, that the Objects of his Meditation will engage him to write of: And by this difficult exercise of his Inventive faculty, he may by degrees so improve it, and, after a while, attain to so pliant a Style that scarce any Thought will puzzle him to fit words to it, and he will be able to cut out Expressions, and make them sit close to such Subjects, as a Person unaccustom'd to such a kind of Composures, would find it very difficult to write of, with any thing of propriety. (39-40)

Boyle again confronts the reader with the problem of “distress” and “difficult[y],” once more juxtaposing such intimidating descriptors with an image of a state of serenity in which “scarce any Thought will puzzle” the attentive mind: the latter is the outcome of a continual practice of reflection. Yet the “difficult[y]” at issue here is less threatening than it might at first appear. It is technical rather than affective—a question of the sophisticated craftsmanship required to fashion a new vocabulary rather than of the sweat on the craftsman’s brow. Indeed, motivation for reflection is assumed rather than solicited: “Subjects invite” the observer to meditate on them and “the Objects of his Meditation...engage him to write of” all manner of “unfamiliar...Subjects,” so that the agency of objects seems already to have set the observer on the path of reflection and the only question that remains is whether he will manage to “write of [them], with any thing of propriety.”

The answer to this question is that “pliant...Style” permits the meditator, by way of his “Composures,” to “sit close to such Subjects,” approximating the unfamiliar through flexibility of mind. The word “Invention” is a hinge between Renaissance rhetoric and post-humanist creativity. In Bacon, the word still refers to the skillful deployment of tropes—readymade rhetorical gestures—but here “Invention” is “exercise[d]” in order to “[coin] various and new Expressions.” The “various,” “uncommon,” and “odd” require a language that transforms in accordance with its subject—a language alive to the non-linguistic. The unpredictability of the occasions that will draw the mind into meditation requires a suitably ductile language.

Boyle underlines the association of states of feeling and forms of writing by using terms that yield double readings, pointing in both directions: “Expressions” might indicate a written version of a person’s state of mind, or it might refer to the manifestation of emotion in the body or the face. Similarly, “Composures” suggest both written compositions and the temperament or disposition in which such writing takes place.

Yet “suppleness” of style is not only a consequence of the unforeseeable objects that send the mind into a state of contemplation. It is also a consequence of the aleatory nature of metaphor itself. It is not simply that occasions for meditation happen by chance, but that the practice of meditation is presided over by chance: the very medium of reflection—language—is defined by unpredictability. Boyle suggests that the practice of occasional reflection, which proceeds by discovering analogies and metaphors for firsthand experiences, will “furnish...Resemblances”

that do not already appear in “the Books of Similitudes, already extant,” bringing unexpected figures of speech into existence (41-2). This is a good illustration of why Hunter’s disparaging remark that Boyle’s sentences “seem to unfold or re-entangle in a way that surprises the author himself” is unsatisfying. Boyle writes: “The Comparisons that may be this way lighted on, may sometimes prove strange, and unobvious enough, to be surprising ev’n to Himself, as well as to his Auditors, or his Readers” (42). Boyle pictures a meditator who “light[s] on” figures that “prove strange” enough to flout his expectations.

A key example of such a figure is the moon, which is more than simply one in a series of endlessly generative images; its capacity to “reflect” makes it a metaphor of Boyle’s practice of “reflection” in general. Boyle quotes Psalm 8:3-4, where David, whose train of thought suits the object-centered investigations of the *Reflections*, wonders about the smallness of humankind relative to the “heavens”: “*When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy hands, the Moon and Stars which thou hast ordained, What is man that thou should’st be mindful of him, or the Son of man that thou visitest him?*” (53). Like the Montaigne whose prose wanders off course as it responds to citations, changing direction as the words of other authors call unexpected thoughts to mind, Boyle writes:

And since our Discourse has led us to the mention of a Text, where the truly inspired Poet (who, by his omitting to speak of the Sun, seems to have compos’d this Psalm in the night) makes the Moon the chief subject of his Meditation, it will not perhaps be amiss, if, on this occasion, we add a few short Reflections on the same Theme, and thereby confirm what we lately noted about the differing Reflections, and Similitudes, which may be afforded by the same subject, as its several Attributes may be differinglly consider’d. (54)

Boyle’s assumption that David’s “consider[ation]” of “the Moon and Stars” confirms that he “compos’d this Psalm in the night” suggests a theory of literary composition in which writing responds to the immediate sensory experience of the author. The “differing Reflections...afforded by [David’s] subject,” the moon, suggest both the “differing” phases of the moon—the various shapes of its reflections of the sun’s light—and the “differing” metaphorical transformations of which the moon is capable in the practice of occasional reflection. In this way, even the behavior of metaphor itself seems to have been suggested by natural phenomena.

Boyle proceeds to demonstrate that the moon does indeed suggest such “differing Reflections,” displaying not only the “suppleness” of analogizing but also the lawlessness whereby it can produce opposite and incompatible figures. Boyle first figures the moon as follows:

For as the Moon, though she receive all the Light that ennobles her from the Sun, does yet, when she is admitted to the nearest Conjunction with him, eclipse that bright Planet, to which she owes all her splendor; so unthankful men abuse those very favours that should endear to them their Benefactors, to the prejudice of those that oblige them. (57)

And yet viewing the moon’s relationship with the tide produces a figure for the opposite sort of relationship:

And 'tis like that our Reflector may, by the way, take notice, That as what passes betwixt the Moon and the Sun, does thus afford him a Simile, whereby to set forth Ingratitude; so what passes betwixt the Moon and the Sea, may supply him with an example of the contrary quality, and put him in mind, that a thankful man will be true and obsequious to his Benefactor, though the person that oblig'd him have lost that Prosperity that before made him conspicuous, and attracted vulgar eyes, as the Sea follows the course of the Moon, not onely when she shines upon it with her full Light, but when at the Change she can communicate little or no light to it. (58)

The moon is a figure for gratitude and ingratitude, depending on the direction of the mind's analogical wanderings. Soon, Boyle's mind proliferates analogies, producing exceedingly strange figures:

As Oysters, and other Shell-fish, are observ'd to thrive at the Increase of the Moon, though her Light be unattended with Heat, and though even when she is at Full, she wants not her spots, so devout Hearers will be careful to prosper proportionably to the Instructions they receive from those Preachers, whose Illuminations are unaccompani'd with Zeal and Charity, and who, when they shine with the greatest Lustre, are not free from their Darknesses, as to some Points, or from notorious Blemishes. (59)

Boyle's reflections pass from figures of positive and negative gratitude to a decidedly strange meditation on the behavior of "Oysters, and other Shell-fish." The flexibility of observation itself, which accommodates any object, meets its match in the flexibility of metaphor-making: an object occasions any number of analogies—including the most incongruous and unintuitive.

Boyle revels in the redoubled strangeness of the practice of reflection rather than worrying that wild digression might steer meditation toward intellectual and emotional danger. He imagines a salutary *mise-en-abyme* of metaphorical reflection, underscoring the radical lawlessness of meditation:

When the Mind is once set on work, though the Occasion administered the first Thoughts, yet those thoughts themselves, may, as well as the Object that excited them, become the Themes of further Meditation: and the Connection of Thoughts within the Mind, may be, and frequently is, so latent, and so strange that the Meditator will oftentimes admire to see how far the Notions he is at length lead to, are removed from those which the first Rise of his Meditation suggested. (76)

"Thoughts" no less than "Object[s]" bear the contingent power to "become... Themes," and thus the "Connection of Thoughts" can only be "strange": a wayward journey of associative reflection culminating in notions "far...removed" from what seemed to be the matter at hand. For Boyle, such a consequence is "admir[able]."

"Occasional reflection" suggests that every moment—of perception as well as thought, both of which are mediated by writing—is a point of departure for further reflections, and as these reflections seem less clearly connected to moments of observation, they come to seem

increasingly metaphorical. Yet each reflection bears the same ontological status as the “occasion” that gives rise to reflection in the first place. This is no Platonic passage away from the Real and into a realm of imitative illusion. Boyle’s observer is he who takes account of whatever chance occurrences cross his path—be they perceptual, intellectual, emotional, or supernatural.

V. Conclusion / Interlude: “Parcels of Time”

The following chapter marks a transition in my analysis of experimentalist affect. So far, my discussion has focused on natural philosophers—Francis Bacon and Robert Boyle—in order to establish the role of casual indifference in experimental observation. By turning to the poems of Andrew Marvell in the next chapter, and then to John Milton in the last one, I explore the effects of experimentalist affect outside the sphere of natural philosophical investigation. My underlying assumption, of course, is that these realms are not easily distinguished: a case can (and will) be made, for instance, that Marvell’s *Upon Appleton House* (1651) is nothing other than an act of experiment. As a heuristic, however, I point out that the first half of this project discusses intellectuals who stand at the very center of most accounts of the rise of modern science. In this way, I hope I have shown that even canonical figures in the history of seventeenth-century science were, from the beginning, engaged in a literary endeavor—marshaling Montaignian “nonchalance” and its rhetorical analogues in order to make experiences of heightened receptivity available to their readers.

Having established that point, I now turn to the role of experimentalist affect in literary and cultural history. I have suggested that seventeenth-century science was literary from the start; I now wish to explore some of the ways seventeenth-century literary texts were scientific, bearing in mind the foregoing point—that the scientific dimensions of these texts was itself constituted by literary experiment. In this way, I create a kind of false chiasmus, showing how literature bears on science before showing how science bears on literature, but with the understanding that this is merely a form of exposition, which does not imply a causal relationship between one realm and the other.

I offer Boyle’s thoughts on the status of every “occasional reflection” as an “Interlude” between other, less leisurely activities as an interlude in this project itself, bridging the first and second halves—spatially, by intervening between chapters 2 and 3, and thematically, by running literary techniques and observational practices together (comparing moments of observation to written parentheses, for instance). In particular, it is worth attending to the following characteristics of Boyle’s remarks:

- (1) The way “meditation” is compared to a “Glass” through which one might inspect the world,
- (2) The way it is defined in opposition to both “Business” and “Recreation” (underlining its status as neither simply strenuous or effortless, but rather defined by a sort of accidental ease),
- (3) Its capacity to induce a paradoxically careless carefulness (where the meticulous preservation of experiences unfolds in the form of a succession of cool “Interludes”),
- (4) The indifference of it, in the sense that it is equally apt for different uses,
- (5) The lawless metaphorical transformations that characterize it (from “Looking-glass” to “Telescope” and then to “Burning-glass), and

(6) The emergence of the central interest of the next chapter—the capacity of careless observation to grant access to all manner of emotional experiences, even those that carelessness would seem to disallow (“Devotion,” “Charity,” and “Zeal”):

For betwixt the more stated Employments, and important Occurrences of humane Life, there usually happen to be interpos'd certain Intervals of Time, which, though they are wont to be neglected, as being singly, or within the Compass of one day inconsiderable, yet in a Man's whole Life, they may amount to no contemptible Portion of it. Now these uncertain Parentheses, (if I may so call them) or Interludes, that happen to come between the more solemn Passages (whether Business, or Recreations) of humane Life, are wont to be lost by most men, for want of a Value for them, and ev'n by good Men, for want of Skill to preserve them: For though they do not properly despise them, yet they neglect, or lose them, for want of knowing how to rescue them, or what to do with them. But as though grains of Sand and Ashes be a part, but of a despicable smallness, and very easie, and liable to be scatter'd, and blown away; yet the skillful Artificer, by a vehement Fire, brings Numbers of these to afford him that noble substance, Glass, by whose help we may both see our selves, and our Blemishes, lively represented, (as in Looking-glasses) and discern Celestial objects, (as with Telescopes) and with the Sun-beams, kindle dispos'd Materials, (as with Burning-glasses). So when these little Fragments, or Parcels of Time, which if not carefully look'd to, would be dissipated, and lost, come to be manag'd by a skillful Contemplatory, and to be improv'd by the Celestial fire of Devotion, they may be so order'd, as to afford us both Looking-glasses, to dress our Souls by, and Perspectives to discover Heavenly wonders, and Incentives to inflame our hearts with Charity and Zeal. (9-10)

Chapter 3

“Languishing with Ease”: Injury and Inquiry at Marvell’s Nun Appleton

A recent biography of Andrew Marvell bears the subtitle, *The Chameleon*.⁷⁰ A book-length study of his poems declares him a “poet-without-persona” who is also a “poet-with-too-many-personas” (Colie 5). Even a critic who explains the protean quality of Marvell’s public face with self-assurance nonetheless speaks of the “disconcerting dexterity” with which he “could tack between opposing sides” in the tumultuous years stretching from the outbreak of civil war through the restoration (Norbrook 244).⁷¹ The fault for modern incomprehension seems somehow to rest with the poet himself: Marvell “disconcert[s]” scholars because he is shifty, in the double sense of variable and untrustworthy.⁷² One comes away from these appraisals with the impression that Marvell is responsible for a failure to make himself legible, which is as much an ethical shortcoming as a practical one.⁷³

When scholars descend to the details of Marvell’s poems, they tend to adopt a more charitable view, transmuting the duplicity of Marvell’s public self into the indecision of the private one: external variability is simply internalized. But if it is unfair to cast suspicion on Marvell because his words and deeds seem inconsistent, it is equally unscrupulous to render him familiar by endowing him with ordinary ambivalence. After all, what claim is less controversial, in nearly every quarter of the humanities, than the attribution of self-doubt to any writer deemed “literary” and thus granted the prestige of psychological depth? No matter the object of interpretation (politics and sexuality loom especially large in recent scholarship), Marvell’s critics share an interest in the negative affects that attend their subject’s wavering reflections on himself and on his predicament (as an ex-royalist, as an ex-Cromwellian, as a dependent on Lord Fairfax, as a half-conscious member of a sexual minority, and so on). One prominent scholar speculates, in a loosely psychoanalytic mode, that *Upon Appleton House* “is longer [than *The Garden*] in part because it dramatizes the mind’s vacillation at closer range,” as if the very engine of Marvell’s poetic production were the problem of ambivalence (Berger 320). It is remarkable that a historicist approach to the poem, the stakes of which seem worlds away from

⁷⁰ See Smith.

⁷¹ This is a description of Marchamont Nedham, but it is what Marvell “proves to have...in common with [him]” (Norbrook 244).

⁷² There is now a long tradition of “Machiavellian” interpretations of Marvell. See, for instance, Worden. I am grateful to this article for a kind of negative epigraph to my discussion: “And who would charge his poetry with carelessness?” (539).

⁷³ Taking the temperature of critical discourse is different from presenting a critique of a particular argument. I do not suggest that the “impression” I describe is the actual claim of the texts I have cited. Smith, for instance, movingly champions the Marvell who lurks behind the camouflaged exterior, linking his critique of privilege to an undefined “position of exclusion” outside the sexual order of the day. “Marvell stands for liberty,” he writes, unabashedly allegorizing him—“liberty of the subject, liberty in the state, liberty of the self, liberty from political and personal tyrannies: the domination of the public self and the interior private consciousness” (343). My interest here is the background against which such arguments are made. Smith’s eulogy accepts the charge of slipperiness and then renders it legible and sympathetic; I argue that Marvell does not appear slippery through the experimentalist optic he proffers his readers.

the foregoing example, singles out the very same psychic phenomenon, but redefines it in political terms, exploring Marvell's "ambivalence" with respect to military action, about which some decision was a "cruel necessity" ("High Summer" 268, 263). Once again, Marvell seems to hesitate between competing imperatives; only their names have been changed.

Turning one's back on one's allies suggests treachery; the same gesture, driven inward, connotes psychic complexity. These are versions of the same interpretation, flavored differently by moral judgment. Their resemblance is especially striking in the light of Marvell's famous "detachment," a quality widely remarked upon but easily explained away, no matter its apparent incongruity with stock disquiet.⁷⁴ Critics treat Marvell's aloofness as an inversion of the qualities under discussion—as, that is, a disavowal of ambivalence, which often takes the form of a fantasist's escape from unpleasant realities.⁷⁵ Thus the speaker of *Upon Appleton House* "shifts to the more distant perspectives of art and science" so that "immediate problems are dissolved in microscopic and telescopic vistas" (Berger 306). Another reading, focusing on Marvell's "remote and passive love" for little girls, describes such abortive longing as a "magical bulwark against the deprivations of time and sex upon the speaker," so that inactive desire represses an anxiety about real-world sexuality (Silver 35). Such interpretations encourage Marvell's readers to ignore one of the most distinctive aspects of his poetry: the charge of escapism minimizes the importance of a tonal serenity that readers detect not only in the lyric voice but also in the atmosphere his poems permit them to inhabit.

The convolutions of Marvell criticism, which have managed to make a poet whose signature is emotional calm yet another example of worried self-division, hide an abiding mystery.⁷⁶ Many of the critics I have already quoted stand on the threshold of this mystery, but the immediate conversion of detachment into escapist fantasy obscures their view. Had they taken detachment seriously, they might have asked the questions I now wish to pose: Why does the preeminent poet of casual dispassion generate a body of work that teems—to the point of overflowing—with hallucinatory images and figures of speech? What connects Marvell's

⁷⁴ Colie, for example, describes Marvell's poetics as "typically 'critical,' indeed, almost scientific in its detachment" (6). Picciotto is alone in taking this observation in the paradoxical direction I explore below. She speaks of an "almost inhuman combination of immersion and detachment" ("Labors" 375).

⁷⁵ Berger also evades the interpretive problem I wish to engage, but not by treating detachment as disavowal of emotion. Instead, it is rendered non-emotional. In his reading of *The Garden*, he writes, "We are not, as I mentioned before, to read *The Garden* as a poem about Andrew Marvell in a garden; it is a poem about Andrew Marvell imagining himself in a garden, staging or trying out—indeed evoking—the impulse to withdrawal. The tone of the first four stanzas is for the most part detached—by which I mean objective, not *cool*, for Marvell obviously enjoys the exercise of wit, and I think we sense that he is *watching himself* go through his paces" ("Green World" 281). But objectivity, I have been arguing in every chapter of this dissertation, is often contingent on coolness—nowhere more so than in Marvell.

⁷⁶ I have described one way in which scholars typically avoid taking coolness seriously (casting it as disavowal), but there are others. Colie's discussion of the way Marvell "permits a reader to see how *sprezzatura* is achieved—what work, what play, must go into his art" is a good example, describing a nonchalance which is a laboriously-constructed, poetic *effect* rather than a quality of feeling (105). See Chapter 1 for my critique of the discourse of artful artfulness around the notion of *sprezzatura*.

preternatural calm and his predilection for poetic metamorphoses so wild they run the risk of seeming arbitrary? What accounts for the apparent haphazardness of emotional peace?

The present chapter answers these questions by exploring Marvell's experimentalist affect. In foregoing chapters, I described the role of Montaignian "nonchalance" in the development of Baconian natural philosophy, exploring the way emotion, epistemology and ethics are joined together in the earliest descriptions of objectivity. Here, I show that Baconianism sheds light on the perennial mystery of Marvell's tranquility: more specifically, it establishes a link between minimalist affect and maximalist poetics.

In Chapter 1, I argued that the Montaignian disposition of Bacon's natural philosopher relaxes the practice of experimental observation, which achieves the crucial effect of intensifying receptivity. Bacon frees observation from imperatives past and future (the precedents and foregone conclusions for which he faults the scholastics) by theorizing an affect distinct from the teleology of drives and desires, and experimental inquiry contracts into the space of the present moment.⁷⁷ In Chapter Two, I explored Robert Boyle's similar interest in the sensory awareness of "Carelessness," a state of affective calm attuned to chance occurrences (which the scholastics would have excluded from the realm of knowledge on the basis of their status as "accidents"). In the present chapter, I show that Marvell's poetry follows a similar pattern; he makes weakness of feeling a doorway to breadth of experience—nowhere more so than in his most freewheeling experiment, *Upon Appleton House*, in which he charts a course across Thomas Lord Fairfax's estate "as Chance or Inclination direct[s]" him—to use one of Boyle's formulations (129). The poem's diversity of contents is not a sign of self-division; on the contrary, the speaker's stable equanimity destabilizes the world under investigation, revealing its hidden properties.

One way to describe Marvell's Baconian inheritance is to speak of a renewal of Montaignian concerns.⁷⁸ In Chapter 1, I explained that although Bacon's account of experimental

⁷⁷ This understanding of freedom is one reason for the incompatibility of my argument with that of John Rogers, for whom "the period's analogical imperative...that cultural pressure always pushing for the structural alignment of representations of political and material organization...best explains [the] appearance of an alternative science at a moment of political and social conflict" (9). I am skeptical of such an "analogical imperative" with respect to experimentalism, since one of the central achievements of the latter is its refusal to assume easy correspondences between natural, political, and spiritual orders. The freedom claimed by Baconian affect is a separation from exactly the sort of foregone conclusion the "analogical imperative" suggests (the assumption of predictable correspondences across the created world).

⁷⁸ One of the very best readings of *Upon Appleton House*, and one of the only ones that speaks directly to my concerns, is unsurprisingly the one that explores Marvell's debt to Montaigne. (See Chapters 1 and 2 for my discussion of Montaignian Experimentalism.) Colie writes, "Both the poet figure and the landscapes he passes through in the course of the poem's day are treated in a way owing much to Montaigne's conception of *passage*; in 'Upon Appleton House' a personality with no fixed boundaries glides through a series of experiences rendered, and therefore interpreted, in very different contexts, literary languages, and literary moralities. There is something tentative about the way the poet moves through his landscape and through his poem, writing as if he were actually living the scenes and experiences that are his subject, as if he were himself uncertain of what was about to happen next, or how an incident will turn out, or how it ought to be understood or interpreted" (182-3). I would specify, in addition, that Montaigne's term *couler* is as good a figure as *passage* for Marvell's style.

affect draws inspiration from Montaigne, he turns his attention from nonviolence to cognition: an epistemology that promotes peace becomes a peaceful state of feeling that promotes understanding. This is not to suggest that Bacon ignores the ethical component of Montaignian affect; on the contrary, his famously vivid description of the scholastics (“fierce with dark keeping”) confirms, like the Montaigne of “De l’experience,” that epistemological error is closely aligned with the violence of the passions (146). However, Bacon has abstracted Montaigne’s ethics of “nonchalance,” recasting a specific response to the experience of the *guerres civiles* as a more general concern with interpersonal gentleness—*pace* the scholarly tradition that associates Bacon with the rape and torture of the natural world. Marvell derives a robust nonviolence from the irenic connotations of Baconian affect, making an explicit connection between the receptivity of casual indifference and the cessation of war—a connection Montaigne had already established. For Marvell, emotional ease is nonviolence, and experimentalist receptivity depends on peace.

Notwithstanding Marvell’s “return” to Montaigne, it is his Baconianism that renders his poetry most comprehensible. However, it is only in the light of my account of Baconian affect that the most instructive context for his *oeuvre* comes into view. Marvell’s coordination of carelessness and receptivity shares the crucial features of Baconian emotion, as I described them in foregoing chapters, and his affective inheritance integrates the two historical contexts that have proved most fruitful to recent scholarship in this field: the scientific developments that are my own persistent interest and the widespread apocalypticism of mid-17th-century theological and political rhetoric. Marvell’s experimentalist affect reveals how these two contexts in fact comprised a single one. Marvell understands the temporal distortions of Baconian affect as a reinvention of eschatology, and the cosmic view afforded by eschatology enhances the poetics of receptivity that structures his body of work.

Margarita Stocker has offered a persuasive account of Marvellian apocalypse, but one that suffers from its failure to explore a specifically experimentalist conception of eschatology. She demonstrates that apocalyptic rhetoric had permeated English society with such completeness by the time of the Civil War that both royalists and parliamentarians could speak of their causes in terms of sacred history (2). Especially instructive is her analysis of the way this rhetoric confuses active and passive political stances, directing God’s human servants to pursue His ends with vigor but also suggesting that He achieves his objectives without need of human assistance (12). Marvell’s famous remark on the Civil War in the *Rehearsal Transpros’d* that “the Cause was too good to have been fought for” can be understood as an adaptation of this dimension of Protestant theology: ultimately, the very best “Cause,” the acceleration of the Second Coming, is not within the power of humankind.⁷⁹ Stocker notes that Marvell’s skepticism around overvaluations of human agency pervades his poems, an observation I extend below.

On the other hand, Stocker’s understanding of the *eschaton* is far simpler than it was for Marvell: she suggests that most Englishmen and –women believed that they were living in the Last Days and that history would soon come to an abrupt end. Though such rhetoric was undoubtedly common, Marvell spoke of apocalypse as if it were present rather than imminent—as if it referred to an unveiling of the sacred already underway. For this reason, Stocker errs when she claims to discover teleology in the genealogical section of *Upon Appleton House*. For

⁷⁹ Rogers phrases the common quandary of Protestant theology as follows: “What is the point of political action in the face of a revolution overseen and perhaps even controlled by a higher, inhuman power?” (69).

Marvell, she writes, “the teleological pattern which he represents within family history is analogous to the eschatological tendency of time itself,” but in fact the poem participates in the critique of teleology that defined Baconian inquiry (52). As I explained in Chapter 1, Bacon’s celebration of a state of feeling in which “satisfaction and appetite are perpetually interchangeable” had given a novel shape to the course of time. Marvell follows Bacon’s lead in envisioning a future (“satisfaction”) that intersects and transforms a present that seems to long for it (“appetite”). States of feeling correspond to patterns of temporality, so that “satisfaction” annuls “appetite” along with the disappointing separation of the (worldly) present from the (supernatural) future. Marvell accepts the Baconian imperative to look past false appearances and into a hidden world with ontological priority over the given one, and gives the non-teleological temporality that enables such acuity of perception an eschatological dimension by imagining an apocalypse that is not a *telos*. “Apocalypse” names the unfolding of the sacred within the present scene of experimental observation.

Marvell’s casual indifference is the affective analogue of his eschatology: calm receptivity reveals the efflorescence of a sacred world normally obscured by fallen modes of perception. In this way, Marvell’s experimentalist theology is historically unique and counterintuitive. In other contexts (within and beyond the 17th century), apocalypse tends to be rendered with a passionate intensity totally foreign to Baconian carelessness, as in these exemplary lines from Abiezer Coppe’s *Fiery Flying Roll*: “High mountains! lofty cedars! it’s high time for you to enter into the rocks and to hide you in the dust for fear of the Lord and for the glory of his majesty. For the lofty looks of man shall be humbled and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord ALONE shall be exalted in that day” (6). This declamatory voice matches the dramatic overturning traditionally associated with the Second Coming, while Marvell’s cool perusal of a world in which the Comings of the Lord cannot be counted because He is always at work within it is a fresh departure in theology, suggesting a world in which such overturning is continuous and should thus be taken as a matter of course. The insufficiency of Stocker’s description of Marvell’s tone, which she calls “joco-serious,” owes to the difficulty of accepting the possibility of such casual millenarianism (46). She writes that “wit and comedy are instruments of conviction, sharpening the impact of statement,” an observation that suits Marvell’s later prose satires, but that misses the affective experimentalism of his poems (44). For Stocker, the lightness of his tone must be shown to hide polemical intensity, since the latter seems the only appropriate mode of address for the Last Days.

John Rogers’ analysis of Marvell considers the exact set of historical contexts to which I have called attention—nonviolence, millenarianism, and natural philosophy—but my own focus on the temporal innovations of experimentalist affect makes our interpretations incompatible. Rogers’ account shares with Stocker’s the assumption that apocalyptic time can only be teleological. This premise drives a wedge between the “natural” and the “theological” in poems like *Upon Appleton House*, though in fact, as I demonstrate below, Marvell’s poems identify these realms with one another. Rogers argues that Marvell’s “ethic of natural growth and development” seeks to counter the violence associated with the Civil War, suggesting the possibility of a “passive revolution” that might have been an alternative to bloodshed (74, 70). He draws a contrast between progressive natural processes and the suddenness of divine intervention, and then offers a nuanced interpretation of the tension between these versions of temporality in *Upon Appleton House*. “The rhetoric of the eschatological transcendence of worldly history,” he writes, “is logically incompatible with a more Winstanleyan, millenarian hope in a budding reformation here on earth” (78). The problem here is evidenced by Rogers’

language itself: Wistanley's "reformation here on earth" was indeed "millenarian," an adaptation of eschatology rather than an alternative to it. As Joanna Picciotto has shown, the collective labor of experimentalist knowledge production was an extension of Wistanley's aspiration to recreate Paradise on earth.⁸⁰ The eschatological dimensions of Marvell's poems, I suggest, are in line with the Wistanleyan project, rather than opposed to it.⁸¹ For Marvell, Baconian temporality corresponds with terrestrial reformation. Casual attentiveness locates the apocalyptic future within the worldly present.⁸²

The present chapter focuses on Marvell's sustained experiment in Baconian affect, *Upon Appleton House*, but seeks to unfold his apocalyptic vision by turning first to his clearest illustration of the temporal distortions of Baconian affect, the famous "cavalier" lyric, "To His Coy Mistress." It seems to belong to the genre of the *carpe diem* poem, which is emphatically about time—about the need to "seize the day" rather than bear the burden of waiting. But Marvell's famous lyric explodes the genre, locating the future in the present (in good Baconian fashion) by adopting an affective coolness in which "appetite" only appears in conjunction with its "satisfaction." By giving Baconian temporality an explicitly eschatological dimension, the poem makes the similar gesture of *Upon Appleton House* more comprehensible. The longer poem is normally paired with *The Garden* or juxtaposed with pastorals like the "Mower" sequence; my hope is that a less predictable comparison will not only underline Marvell's casual apocalypticism, but also indicate the fruitfulness of taking casual indifference seriously as a persistent feature of his poetics, bridging genres and modes of address.

Ultimately, my aim is to show how *Upon Appleton House* enriches our understanding of experimentalist affect by placing emphasis on experiences of breadth rather than certainty. Marvell's apocalypticism is a symptom of a more general interest in granting as wide a scope as possible to the heightened awareness that attends muted feeling. What narrative frame could possibly be larger than that of sacred history? Marvell imagines a receptivity that extends beyond the worldly domain of Montaigne, Bacon, and Boyle by granting supernatural animation to the earth. He pictures a world in cosmic flux—one hidden by the habitual vehemence of thought. In this way, he exemplifies an experimentalism that escapes familiar histories of the emergence of modern science. To expose oneself to myriad stimuli is to lose the intellectual clarity achieved by the clear isolation of a single object of inquiry. Marvell's experimentalism welcomes the derangement of the world rather than the orderly disposal of it: the moment of discovery rather than that of understanding.

What is discovered is not only an entire cosmos of sensation but also, more provocatively, a world of emotional experience. Marvell depicts a porous form of selfhood, the

⁸⁰ See Picciotto ("Labors"), Ch. 1 and 2.

⁸¹ Norbrook argues persuasively against the claim that Marvell's references to the Diggers in *Upon Appleton House* are meant to insult: "'This naked equal Flat,' we are told, is a pattern for the Levellers. This is sometimes taken as a routine jibe against radicals, but the effect may be more complicated. Marvell is glancing at the Diggers or 'True Levellers' who were active in the vicinity; but the idea of going back to a more equitable mode of representation was built into the Leveller political programme.... The flatness of the meadow scene, for all its austerity, has a utopian quality, a sense of returning to origins both in nature and in art" (291).

⁸² Rogers is right to speak of a "specifically terrestrial millennium" but is wrong to cordon this event off from "transcendent revelation" (55). Marvell fuses transcendence and immanence, maximizing the "millennial" power of "terrestrial" change.

extent of which is shown by the hospitality of Marvell's insouciance to the otherness of the passions, including those that carry a *chaleur* nonchalance would seem to rule out, if only on the basis of common sense. Experimentalist affect is as much a mode of relating to other emotional experiences as it is an experience in its own right. The speaker of *Upon Appleton House* is subject to the passions without being subsumed by them; they pass through his experience without saturating it. In this way, experimentalist affect implies an incoherent subject whose primary experience of that incoherence could not be farther from anxiety.⁸³ Indeed, it is not as if a seemingly unified subject suddenly has to grapple with self-division; the incoherence of subjectivity is taken as a matter of course. Nonchalance is the pleasurable syncopation of non-identity—an experience of self-differentiation as a gliding movement rather than a painful rupture. It is the synchronization of the self with the impossibility of a Self.⁸⁴ Marvell's speaker is a composite of distinct passions, as well as dispassion, which are simply (and only momentarily) held together—without having to be synthesized.

Marvell's composite emotions offer a solution to one of the interpretive impasses that has most frustrated critics of *Upon Appleton House*: the question of the speaker's tone—not the one I emphasized above (how does serenity generate visionary complexity?) but a simpler one about the speaker's inconstancy. Many scholars, even those who underscore Marvell's detachment, discern wild fluctuations of tone over the course of the poem's 97 stanzas. Many of them struggle to understand the careening movement of the poet's mood, a problem which only intensifies when one tries to square this disorderly motion—emotion—with the speaker's disengagement. Thus Derek Hirst and Steven Zwicker refer to the “extravagant tone,” “bizarreness of tone,” “oddity of tone,” and “perplexing tone” of different sections of the poem—signaling their bewilderment an astonishing number of times for an article of only 22 pages (“High Summer” 257, 259, 261, 262). Similarly, James Turner speaks for many when he asks, “Is the prevailing tone serious or frivolous, melancholy or heart-warming?” (“Warlike Studies” 292).⁸⁵ (Recall Stocker's “joco-serious,” which compresses this alternation into a simple formula.) Experimentalist affect casts a clarifying light on these confusions. Indifference becomes a mode of engagement rather than disengagement, and detachment begins to look like

⁸³ In this way, Marvellian emotion offers an alternative to recent theories of affect that align self-division with discomfort. See, for instance, Fisher's influential account, which thematizes the disruption of coherent selfhood through Stoic conceptions of fear.

⁸⁴ See the Preface for Montaigne's conception of that impossibility.

⁸⁵ On the other hand, Turner's assessment of the poem, which I discuss in greater detail in part II of this chapter, differs from most in its canny attempt to read such tonal inconsistency as a political strategy rather than a confusion, hesitation, or act of self-camouflage. Turner argues that the poem refuses the consolations of the tradition that draws a “parallel” between “rural and military life”—a “well-established and comfortable literary conceit....” (“Warlike Studies” 289). In place of the “polarisation of the innocent and the violent, which allows us to contemplate their emblematic resemblance in safety,” Marvell's poem suggests a “separation” which is “less complete; his conceits, like military life itself, are both comforting and disturbing” (289). Although, as I explain below, my emphasis on Marvell's carelessness is not in line with Turner's interest in the “disturb[ance]” of “[comfort],” I admire his attempt to understand, rather than throw up his hands at, the poem's tonal shifts. T.S. Eliot's classic appraisal of Marvell is another rare example of this effort: “...this alliance of levity and seriousness (by which the seriousness is intensified) is a characteristic of the sort of wit we are trying to identify” (68).

the wrong word for Marvell's famous coolness—since the speaker fully inserts himself in the many situations the poem describes *by virtue of his dispassion*. “Bizarreness” dissolves as soon as indifference is correlated with breadth of emotional experience. It eventually comes as no surprise that indifference yields “extravagan[ce].”

I. Anatomy of an Afterthought: “To His Coy Mistress”

“Had we but world enough, and time.”⁸⁶ The opening line of Marvell's most famous poem has entered the repertoire of literary citations that double as commonplaces. The meaning of the phrase is clear in contemporary usage: we wish we could fulfill our countless desires, but we express this wish in the subjunctive because complete satisfaction is never possible. I propose that this vernacular account is an accurate précis of the entire poem, and that what seems like a simplistic observation (“time is tight”) reveals a feature of Marvell's poetics about which his critics have not been sensitive. Because the poem's persistent interest *really is* the tightness of time, the speaker's wish to encompass more of the “world” should be read as an interruption of an explicit statement of purpose. “Had we but time enough,” the speaker might have said, thereby naming the desire at the heart of the poem, but instead he appends this sentiment like an afterthought to a supposed wish, but one that never succeeds at holding his interest.⁸⁷

Marvell makes frequent recourse to this strategy (in 5 of the 15 sentences that comprise the poem), the most significant effect of which is to transform the reader's experience of time—making the poem's initial suspension of the word “time” an appropriate point of departure for the suspensions that follow. Phrases as unforthcoming as these induce the impatient expectation the poem describes, as the speaker attempts to seduce his “mistress” by exhorting her to seize the moment. On the other hand, the poem teaches the reader how to experience suspension in a different way. Like Bacon, who ties the chronological timeline in a knot by making desire and gratification coincide, Marvell *adds* past yearning and future fulfillment *onto* the experience of the present, collapsing these distinct realms into an expansive moment of satisfaction, a strategy he presents as a theme in the closing stanza. Marvell trains the reader to notice that the poem has performed this operation throughout, articulating its most energetic pronouncements as aggregations, grammatically speaking—appending them with the word “and” to trivial remarks. Marvell ensures that his most crucial utterances are experienced by way of conjunction: they must be added to what happens now, and the reader must be made to register the addition.

Carelessness is the affective precondition for these temporal distortions. Marvell's offhandedness permits the casual addition of his weightiest remarks, and thus a gesture of inconsequence is also an instrument that amasses experiences with distinct temporal locations. Emotional ease enables the interpolation of the past and the future into a present it thereby renders apocalyptic, giving the “persuasion to love” poem a cosmic scale it only makes explicit in its final moments by alluding to the commentary of First Corinthians on the Second Coming.

⁸⁶ Throughout, I will be consulting Smith's Longman edition of Marvell's poems.

⁸⁷ The claim that Marvell's interest is “time” rather than the “world” does not presume that a concept as capacious as the “world” might be excluded from an interpretation of the poem. The point is only that the poem's predominant motif is the quickness of time, especially as signaled by the imagery of death and decay, which renders strange the placement of as vague a desire as a wish for more “world” before any mention of temporality.

In this way, it clarifies the role of the non-teleological in experimentalist theology, casting a new light on the “progress” habitually associated with the new science.

The most persuasive and nuanced account of sacred history within the sphere of experimentalism is Picciotto’s; my exploration of the warping of temporality answers one of the questions her argument raises. Picciotto writes of an experimentalist preference for progressive over cyclical temporalities, contrasting the gradual restoration of Paradise through the labors of knowledge production (experimentalists imitated prelapsarian Adam through “innocent” observation, remaking the world by “cultivating truth”) with the repetitive ritual celebrations of the festival calendar (88).⁸⁸ I wish to complement Picciotto’s sanguine rhetoric of progress with a dispassionate rhetoric of drift, suggesting that casual indifference recasts progress as a wayward movement rather than a decisive forward motion. Picciotto’s argument itself suggests that experimentalist ideology distorts the vocabulary of “progress” it deploys, but she does not expand on that suggestion:

The blending of purgatorial labor with the pastoral retreat of the garden made a muddle of the means and ends of paradisaal recovery; this was the point. Francis Bacon’s call to regain paradise through experiment was brazenly circular: paradise was blissful because it was the ideal place to practice active philosophy. At once the space of progress and its goal, the purgatorial garden also scrambled the concepts of ‘advancement’ and return, giving spatial expression to the logic of reformation itself. The Great Instauration, which meant both a restoration and a founding or institution, explicitly took the Reformation as its model; like the ideal of the primitive church, the labors of innocence projected the crushed potentials of humanity’s past onto an imminent future. (129)

Picciotto’s eloquent description of a progress that was also a return resembles my description of Baconian affect: the desires of the present moment (a future that might bear the name “progress”) turn out already to have been satisfied (by a present moment the “practice” of “active philosophy” has already rendered “paradisaal”); what remains is a non-teleological activity that is only “progress[ive]” in the sense that it retrieves “crushed potentials”—but without any knowledge ahead of time of what exactly those are and what exactly they make possible. Is “progress” the right word for a wandering movement guided only by dim vision?

What Picciotto locates in an “imminent future” Marvell discovers in the present, as my reading of “To His Coy Mistress” shows. In this section, I explore the poem’s disarmingly cool apocalypse, which will then serve as a point of departure for my reading of *Upon Appleton House*. First, I describe the short lyric’s depiction of linear time and the anxious expectation it generates—an experience repeatedly enacted by Marvell’s suspensions. Second, I consider the alternate theory of temporality presented at the end of the poem: the displacement of protracted expanses of time by aggregations of past, present, and future within the space of a single moment. I show how this alternative opens the possibility of rereading the painful suspensions of the first stanza as instances of carelessly tangled temporality that undermine the experience of chronology within which they occur.

Marvell opens the poem by making the speaker and the reader’s joint experience of waiting intolerable, an effect he achieves by turning the language of linear temporality into an

⁸⁸ See Picciotto (“Labors”), Chapters 1 and 2, especially pp. 87 – 128.

instrument of dismemberment. Like some other post-Petrarchan poets, Spenser being the best example, Marvell ridicules the rhetoric of Renaissance love poetry,⁸⁹ revealing the violent misogyny (not-so-) implicit in the lyric voice that speaks of the beloved's body parts in isolation, thereby severing them from each other.⁹⁰ Unlike his predecessors, Marvell gives the violence of the *blason* a temporal dimension, showing how Petrarchan desire carves time into discrete units—and dismembers the beloved with the same gesture. Marvell's most explicit invocation of that tradition suggests vindictive cruelty, given the accusatory imputation of “coyness” to the speaker's “mistress” in the opening couplet, but the exaggeration with which the speaker describes the passage of time in these verses conveys an irony no reader could miss (2):

An hundred years should go to praise
 Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze.
 Two hundred to adore each breast;
 But thirty thousand to the rest.
 An age at least to every part,
 And the last age should show your heart. (13-18)

The reader does not imagine the beloved so much as an assortment of body-parts: the eyes, the forehead, one breast and then the other. The reader's eye then passes over a sequence of unnamed fleshy “part[s]” and finally lands upon the heart. The temporal vocabulary ensures a dismemberment far more striking than the routine anatomies of the *blason*. A rhetorical violence is rendered phenomenological: the implicit dismemberment of the poet who praises the beloved

⁸⁹ See Spenser's identification of this tradition with the lustful hunger of cannibals in Book VI, canto 8, stanzas 41 - 43 of *The Faerie Queene*: “But all bootes not: they hands vpon her lay; / And first they spoile her of her iewels deare, / And afterwards of all her rich array; / The which amongst them they in peeces teare, / And of the pray each one a part doth beare. / Now being naked, to their sordid eyes / The goodly threasures of nature appeare: / Which as they view with lustfull fantasies, / Each wisheth to him selfe, and to the rest enuyes. / Her yvorie necke, her alabaster brest, / Her paps, which like white silken pillows were, / For loue in soft delight thereon to rest; / her tender sides, her bellie white and clere, / Which like an Altar did it selfe vprere, / To offer sacrifice diuine theron; / her goodly thighs, whose glorie did appeare / Like a triumphal Arch, and thereupon / The spoiles of Princes hang'd, which were in battel won. / Those daintie parts, the dearlings of delight, / Which mote not be prophan'd of common eyes, / Those villains vew'd with loose lasciuious sight, / And closely tempted wit their craftie spyes; / And some of them gan mongst themselues deuize, / Thereof by force to take their beastly pleasure.” I am grateful to Janet Adelman for discussing this passage with me.

⁹⁰ A good example of the implicit dismemberment of the *blason* is the architectural/ornamental anatomy of the 23rd sonnet in Ronsard's *Les Amours* (1552), which treats each of the beloved's body-parts as a separate inanimate object: “Ce beau coral, ce marbre qui soupire, / Et cet ébène, ornement d'un sourci, / Et cet albâtre en voute racourci, / Et ces zaphirs, ce jaspe, & ce porphyre: / Ces diamants, ces rubis, qu'un Zephyre / Tient animés d'un soupir adouci, / Et ces oeilletts, & ces roses aussi, / Et ce fin or, où l'or mesme se mire: / Me sont au coeur en si profond esmoi, / Qu'un autre object ne se present à moi, / Si non le beau de leur beau que j'adore: / Et le plaisir qui ne se peut passer / De les songer penser, & repenser, / Songer, penser, & repenser encore” (96-7).

by addressing each of her body-parts in isolation becomes the sensory dismemberment of the poet who fixes a monomaniacal “gaze” upon a single body-part for “an hundred years.” Marvell’s specific allotments of time underscore the satirical edge of his imagery. Only one hundred years go to the mistress’s eyes, and only four hundred to both her breasts, though these are the most consistently over-praised features of the mistress’s body in the tradition. The thirty thousand years Marvell designates for “the rest” is sixty times as many as he gives to all those preeminent marks of beauty taken together, making the reader imagine absurd Petrarchan paeans to the mistress’s toe, say, or to her earlobe (to say nothing of the risqué possibilities the poet’s vagueness teasingly evokes). To figure the erotic through the language of linear temporality comes to seem as silly as it is violent.

Marvell makes anxiety the affective analogue of the timeline’s violence. At first, the opening stanza seems to be merely counterfactual: “Had we but world enough, and time,” the speaker explains, his mistress would receive the treatment he describes. Given the violence of the speaker’s praise, however, and his initial description of the mistress as a “crim[inal],” it is hard not to read the counterfactual as imagined retribution. In this light, the stanza’s description of linear expectation makes the mistress suffer as the speaker has: he responds to the pain of anxious waiting for gratification by perpetrating psychic violence against she who has kept him waiting. The stanza’s final couplet confirms the identification of the counterfactual and the violent expression of a wish, which is also the identification of the speaker’s suffering and the mistress’s. Immediately after those punishing lines, quoted above, Marvell writes:

For Lady you deserve this state;
Nor would I love at lower rate. (19-20)

The mistress “deserves this state” in the sense that she is worthy of the dignity of extended praise; given the opportunity, the speaker would not express his worshipful desire in less extravagant fashion. And yet she also “deserves this state” in the sense that she “deserves” the gruesome result of the dismemberment he has just performed. The speaker’s remark that he would not express his love more cheaply might also indicate that he has slowed down as much as he is willing, even in his imagination: a lower “rate,” a slower speed, would be even more agonizing for both of them than the one he has just imagined. Retaliation has its limit—as does the suppression of desire, even when mitigated by fantasies of violence.

In this affective context, the poem’s first suspensions create unpleasant periods of expectation that resemble those the speaker has to endure. The reader, like the mistress, is punished, but not through compensatory violence: instead, she is required to inhabit the speaker’s own situation (a punishment he is incapable of enacting on the mistress herself, except insofar as she shares the reader’s position as addressee). I have already discussed this effect in the poem’s opening line, but it is important to observe that Marvell recreates it two more times in the same stanza, so that three of the poem’s five suspensions appear in the first stanza, exactly the place where linear temporality is most emphatically described (whereas each of the remaining two stanzas contains only a single suspension). The second couplet reads:

We would sit down, and think which way
To walk, and pass our long love’s day. (3-4)

The imagined scenario that occupies the first two-thirds of this sentence is banal: had they enough time, the speaker and his lover would “sit down” together and decide “which way to walk,” performing a staid courtship ritual. With the insertion of the final phrase, appended to the foregoing with the word “and,” Marvell exposes the poem’s marrow, since the question of how to “pass our long love’s day”—a question about the temporality of desire—is the basic premise of the speaker’s “complain[t]” (7). Yet the couplet imagines the unremarkable choreography of courtship before naming the matter at hand, as if it were simply another aspect of the amorous dance, but one that happens to come to mind at the end of the utterance. The reader has to wait for the sentence to matter.

The same can be said for the first stanza’s third suspension: it induces a period of unhappy expectation on the reader’s part. Exploring the counterfactual scenario, the main advantage of which is that time is abundant, Marvell writes:

My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires, and more slow. (11-12)

Like the poem’s opening couplet, these lines refer vaguely to the space the speaker’s desire would fill before naming his central concern: the painful longing time creates. With enough time, the speaker explains, his love would grow to an enormous size—“and” yes, he supposes, now that he considers the preposterous image of the swollen vegetable, such enlargement would require ample time. As ever, length of time—rather than, needless to say, size of vegetable—is the crucial issue, which makes the speaker’s circumlocution an engine of suspense. The reference to time with which the couplet ends feels especially haphazard, like a careless addition, since the comparison of the “slow[ness]” of the speaker’s love to the speed of “empire”-building is clumsy. Although empire-building certainly takes time, its pace carries no particular connotation of protraction. It is as if the comparison that governs the couplet is generated by the size of “vegetable love” (empires are large by definition, at least in relation to nations), and then the “slow[ness]” of empire-building occurs to the speaker as an afterthought—which, like many afterthoughts, is not especially apt.

I have shown that Marvell’s first sequence of suspended sentences all point needlessly to the space in which passion unfolds before casually introducing the crucial issue of the temporal dimension of desire: the speaker wishes for more of the “world,” wonders where “to walk” with his beloved, and imagines the space his unconsummated “love” would take up (were it fantastically, even ridiculously, materialized), before turning to a secondary concern, which is actually a primary concern, with time. In each case, the reader is reminded of the suffering that attends the unfolding of linear time.⁹¹ The final stanza casts a new light on this phenomenon,

⁹¹ The second stanza’s suspension—the poem’s last, before the interpretation of suspension is revised by the final stanza—achieves the same effect as those in the first stanza, but does so by conflating space and time, finally making good on the suggestion of the foregoing examples that space somehow matters to this poem. Marvell writes: “But at my back I always hear / Time’s wingèd chariot hurrying near: / And yonder all before us lie / Deserts of vast eternity” (21-24). Because these lines come at the beginning of the second stanza, the mere mention of passing time no longer packs a punch: although emphasis has been withheld from that motif by the suspensions of the first stanza, its repetition and eventual explicit enactment in the exaggerated *blason* has by now signaled the reader that time is exactly what the poem most wishes to explore.

teaching the reader to alleviate suffering by adopting a different kind of reading. It creates an apocalyptic frame with which the previous stanzas can be reread, announcing the folding together of past and future, life and death, in the space of the present moment, and then suggesting a new understanding of suspension on the basis of that motif.

Its first order of business is to insist that the poem has abandoned the unfolding of linear temporality for a single, expansive moment. “Now, therefore,” the stanza begins, and then twice reiterates the temporal location of the speaker’s final words: “Now” begins the fourth line, and the fifth begins, “And now” (33, 37, 38). The introductory “therefore” intensifies the sensation created by the triple “now,” propelling the reader into the present with the suggestion that all preliminaries have been dealt with, all doubts and second thoughts annulled. The repetition of the conjunction “while” completes the effect:

Now, therefore, *while* the youthful glew
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
And *while* thy willing soul transpires
At every pore with instant fires.... (33-36, italics mine)

Just as the “now” and “therefore” thrust the reader into the present, the double “while” distends the present so that, notwithstanding its brevity, it comes to include a state of affairs so complex that it can only be adequately conveyed through florid description. The poem simultaneously

The initial couplet is thus doubly (perhaps triply) uninteresting: it names a motif no longer in need of naming, misleadingly underlining it by indicating a change in rhetorical direction with the word “but,” and this act of belated and needlessly emphatic naming takes disappointing recourse to stock imagery, since the image of “Time’s wingèd chariot” is lifted directly from emblem books. (Smith describes this image as “quite common” [Longman 82n.22].) Bored expectancy quickly gives way to exhilaration—appended, as usual, as a casual addition, affixed to the first part of the sentence with the word “and.” Indeed, this “and” can be seen as the hinge on which the poem turns, since it draws the reader into the stark, desolate environment of the second half of the poem. She, along with the speaker and his mistress, is suddenly confronted with “deserts of vast eternity” extending “all before us,” an image which suggests inescapable nothingness—the un-redemptive deadness of the future. The final phrase falls like an axe: at four words, it is the poem’s shortest line so far, and its terse finality, punctuated with a period, is devastating. “Vast eternity” deflates the grandiloquent use of the word “vast” in the previous stanza (Smith writes that such diction can be understood as “undermining the fulsome sense of ‘vast’” in the earlier line [Longman 82n.24]) and briefly, because of its redundancy (a small eternity would be an oxymoron), generates a “desert” of meaning—an excess of language that does not signify. By picturing “eternity” as a “desert,” Marvell explicitly pictures time as space (which is implicit in the “vast[ness]” of “eternity”), thereby emphasizing the status of foregoing considerations of spatial “vast[ness]” as figures for periods of time. “Vegetable love,” for instance, now seems more notable for its length than its size. In this way, these four lines repeat the poem’s strategy of suspension, saving for the appended afterthought at least two climaxes: the thematic one, wherein gentle, if grotesque, satire suddenly turns a corner into unflinching severity, and the interpretive one, wherein the tonal confusions of the previous stanza are finally resolved by the identification of time with space.

tightens and broadens its perspective, drawing the reader into a single moment itself in the process of expansion. The remaining two instances of “now” come immediately afterward, one right after the other (in lines 37 and 38), so that the double “while” functions as a parenthesis that opens the space of the “now” just as the speaker is most insistent on it: “Now...now...now.”

The contents of the expansive parenthesis give thematic weight to Marvell’s coordination of narrowness and breadth. These lines suggest that everything that might be spread out across the timeline inhabits the space of a single moment. The speaker describes an intersection of life and death, past and future, in the very lines that drive the poem decisively out of the realm of temporal extension and into the confines of the present. Marvell writes of a “youthful glew” that “sits on” the mistress’s “skin” “like morning dew,” comparing “youthful” lustiness to “dew” on grass. “Glew” refers to sweat, indicating both the vigor and sexual appetite typical of youth (lustiness in both its senses). The mistress’s youth cannot have departed, since it is the premise of the speaker’s exhortation to seize the moment, but it is also conspicuously past—already sloughed off, sitting on the surface of the skin like “dew” that will soon evaporate. Because the lines immediately preceding this stanza evoke the mistress’s death (“The grave’s a fine and private place, / But none I think do there embrace” [31-32]), the simultaneity of past and future acquires a sinister undertone: a skull presses through the mistress’s mask of youth.⁹² The next couplet repeats the gesture of making signs of life coincide with signs of death: a “soul” that “transpires / At every pore with instant fires” is giving signs of vigor even as it passes away, the “fires” coming through its “pore[s]” signaling vitality as well as the “transpir[ation]” of the soul.

The sequence of *nows* thus heralds a new figuration of the concept of the present. It is an abandonment of the timeline for an alternative that cannot be conceived, in the ordinary way, as a slice of it: the “now” is a place where the timeline is endlessly knotted together and thus self-intersecting, where the temporal locations *past* and *future* are eradicated but the contents of those locations are included in a present more capacious than expected. The *blason* at the beginning of the poem depicts the enrichment of experience as the sequential attachment of contiguous moments. Here the procedure is different: such enrichment requires the distension of a single moment so that it includes a universe of possibilities, even those normally located in the future and the past—*projected* there, this poem at last suggests, since the knotted present is granted ontological priority over the traditional sequencing of past, present, and future in a straight line.

The images associated with this temporal knot suggest a rapturous violence that enlivens a speaking body that so far has only passively borne the slow agony of disappointed expectation. The sequence of *nows* has already increased the poem’s speed, goading the reader onward by alerting her to present phenomena, as if they needed quickly to be observed before they disappeared.⁹³ Perhaps the most striking of the stanza’s phantasmagoric images is the violence of the “am’rous birds of prey” into which the speaker and the mistress are transformed (38). Love-

⁹² Stanza LXXXXII in *Upon Appleton House* echoes this image: “Go now fond sex that on your face / Do all your useless study place, / Nor once at vice your brows dare knit / Lest the smooth forehead wrinkled sit: / Yet your own face shall at you grin, / Thorough the black-bag of your skin; / When knowledge only could have filled / And virtue all those furrows tilled.” The implication that this knowledge of facial deterioration is gleaned through self-inspection in a mirror resonates with my discussion, below, of various technologies of glass.

⁹³ These phenomena are only descriptions of the speaker’s fantasies, of course, and thus they are only phenomenal in the sense that they take shape on the page and the reader witnesses them through the process of reading

making takes on the brutality of carnivorous battle; and gratification, the fatalism of a suicide pact. These birds are said to “devour” “Time,” the allegorical figure who earlier appears in a “Winged chariot” that charts a course between past to future. Their ferocity also seems to inform an image that appears four lines below, where the speaker and the mistress “tear” their “pleasures with rough strife,” as if with talons, “Thorough the iron gates of life” (39, 4-44). To shatter linear temporality is also to engage in a self-destructive sex act: these “birds” “tear” at each other and at temporality with claws as corporeal as they are spiritual. Invoking the Aristotelian notion that orgasm is an expenditure of life-force, this mutual violence which is also a violence against Time “make[s]” the “sun” “run,” eradicating linear temporality by welcoming death—and thus, metaphorically, lowering the sun from the sky. Unlike the unidirectional violence of the opening stanza, where the speaker carves up the mistress with measures of duration, this avian violence is reciprocal and reckless, destroying not only the named participants but the world around them and the temporal regime that governs it. The slicing motions of these claws has an air of quickness about it, since “tearing” has to be read also as “tear[ing]...thorough,” and thus as a kind of locomotion. Speed is the phenomenal dimension of the stanza’s departure from linearity, the primary attribute of the latter being painful slowness, as the foregoing stanzas demonstrate.

Along with these concluding images of violent fragmentation, Marvell places an incongruous emphasis on completion and plenitude, thereby introducing an alternate understanding of the poem’s many suspensions. He writes:

Let us roll all our strength, and all
Our sweetness, up into one ball. (41-42)

These lines achieve the astonishing effect of granting explanatory power to vagueness. In light of the stanza’s apocalyptic images, the stanza’s “all...and all” suggests the “all in all” of Cornithians:

For he [Christ] must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all. (1 Corinthians 15: 25-28)

Marvell’s “all...and all” suggests exactly this sort of apocalyptic restoration: death does not have to be feared because it is voided by heavenly intervention.⁹⁴ The poem has replaced the vertical integration of all things conveyed by the repetition of the preposition “under” (5 times in four verses) with the centripetal addition of all things to the fixed but expansive point of the present moment: hierarchical integration is exchanged for inclusive conglomeration. The image is powerful in its non-specificity: the “ball” into which “all our strength” and “all / Our sweetness” are rolled is vague enough to suggest generalized aggregation; everything is to be glommed together and experienced at once. These lines specifically invoke the past and future as objects of accumulative “roll[ing]”: “strength” evokes the youthful vigor the stanza presents as already lost, while “pleasure” evokes a sexual gratification the postponement of which the poem laments. In

⁹⁴ It is worth considering how Marvell’s citation contrasts with Milton’s famous version.

this way, the desires and satisfactions of the past and future are torn free and added to the ever-growing and productively ill-defined “ball” of present gratification. Since the word “all” is contained within the word “ball,” the double “all” is in fact a triple “all,” complementing the triple “now” the stanza articulates in the foregoing lines. These two words, emphatically tripled, offer a condensed version of the final stanza’s imperative: “Now...now...now”! “All....all...all”!

Marvell hints at the status of these lines as instructions for reading by making them an instance of suspension. Throughout the poem, the speaker’s emphasis has been on “pleasure,” not on “strength.” Although I gloss the latter term by referring to youthful vigor, its appearance in this final stanza feels less than *a propos*: “strength” is not a motif the poem foregrounds, even if, here, it can be rendered intelligible. “Pleasure,” on the other hand, is exactly the solution to the problem the poem has posed from the beginning: if longing is an attribute of temporal extension, this final stanza argues, then “pleasure” consists in knotting the timeline. Thus the imperative to “roll all our strength, and all / Our sweetness, up into one ball” once again follows the logic of suspension by presenting the reader first with the inapposite and then with the poem’s central concern. Indeed, the “ball” of “pleasure,” which appears in the suspended phrase, is the crux of the poem: it at last explains the poem’s suspensions. What matters, it turns out, is not the syntactical location of an emphatic turn of phrase, but the occasion its suspension provides for the insertion of an “and.” The conjunction is the linguistic equivalent of apocalyptic conglomeration: a marker of addition that can link any number of terms without establishing subordinating relationships. The use of ampersands in place of the word “and” in the Haward Manuscript and other early copies of this poem adds a layer of support to my argument’s suggestion that aggregation and knot-tying correspond to one another.⁹⁵ The instrument of aggregation, the “and,” is also an image of a knot: “&.”

As it turns out, suspension is the opposite of suspense. At its close, the poem presents the reader with an alternate reading strategy with which to return to the poem. The nonchalance of a speaker who seems only belatedly to remember what matters most no longer generates suspense. On the contrary, the reader learns to share the speaker’s nonchalance, since the poem’s casual additions grant access to otherwise impossible pleasures. Nonchalance is an affective prerequisite for an experience in which everything is “[torn]” away from the prison of its temporal location and grafted onto the present. Casual indifference thus loses its habitual association with the acceptance or affirmation of a state of affairs (the status quo, for example) and begins to look like the condition of apocalypse. Time, desire, and mortality are reinvented with a careless turn of phrase.

II. Nun Appleton: An Inverted Fortress

James Grantham Turner has argued that *Upon Appleton House* should be read as a squarely pacifist exercise. As Turner memorably puts it, the poem “taught the Fairfaxes [Marvell’s patrons] to see life at Appleton as a beginning and not an end, to use these warlike studies [the phrase is Marvell’s] to defeat the legacy of war” (“Warlike Studies” 300). Much ink has been spilt about this poem since Turner wrote these lines, some of it by Turner himself, but the persuasive simplicity of the observation bears repeating. Because the critical paradigm I describe in the opening paragraphs of this chapter locates hidden agitation behind Marvell’s

⁹⁵ The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MS Don. B. 8, pp. 283, reproduced in Smith (Longman 79).

insouciant voice, this poem about peace is almost always understood as a poem about war: peace is a disavowal of actual conflict or a fragile state of affairs over which Marvell wrings his hands. When scholars assume anxious ambivalence and then set about locating it, they are not likely to read the poem as a straightforward bid for anything at all—let alone the laying down of arms, as apparently naive a demand as any.

Recent historicist interventions have further obscured the poem's pacifism. Derek Hirst and Steven Zwicker's attempt to locate the poem at a particular moment in time deserves its status as a touchstone of recent scholarship, but it effaces the poem's celebration of peace. Hirst and Zwicker offer a persuasive argument that the poem was written in the summer of 1651, exploring its "counterpoint of retreat and engagement" as a response to a particular historical problem (254). "At the epicentre of the poem," they write, "is a man facing a very specific decision, whether or not to take up arms for an uncertain cause; and we can identify the moment at which he faced this decision at its height" (256). They carefully recapitulate Thomas Lord Fairfax's refusal to launch a preemptive strike against the Scottish and resultant resignation from the army, and recall that at the moment of the poem's composition, Scottish forces were mobilizing by the border, thereby reversing the situation that brought about the resignation. The simple empiricism of such a methodology generates a multiplicity of historicist observations that can only be reconciled through the metaphor of "ambivalence" (268). Because the poem is decoded by discovering the occasions of its composition, it takes on the multifarious appearance of the totality of its historical moment. Such heterogeneity demands an organizing figure, for which "ambivalence" is a handy choice: it is a psychic state of multiplicity, an emotional container for a diversity of contents.⁹⁶ Hirst and Zwicker do not take the poem's philosophical musings seriously, since they view the philosophical as a repression of the material. "Timeless worlds," they write, "are...consoling terrain when we are unable to fix imaginative texts in a particular historical moment" (247). In a critical landscape still everywhere shaped by the New Historicism, however, might not a "historical moment" function just as well as "consoling terrain"? And might not a careful account of the poem's historical crosscurrents under the sign of the poet's "ambivalence" rule out an adequate assessment of the poem's status as an experimentalist celebration of the end of war?

The tendency to treat this poem as a *difficult* engagement with the *problem* of warfare, of which Hirst and Zwicker are only an example, has distorted its most direct enactment of the restoration of peace: the famous garden sequence, which depicts the transmutation of martial activity into harmonious celebration. Throughout the scholarly literature, this relationship tends to run the other way. Even Turner, the best guide to the poem's irenic inclinations, argues that stanzas XXXVI to XL depict "the military world in its most pleasant aspect, 'in sport,' bustling, decorative and painless," so that Marvell seems to present only the alluring aspects of military activity—one deceptively attractive side of the sordid business of waging war ("Warlike Studies" 295). Others have likewise sought to unearth the violence of warfare buried in this flowering field. But the most basic operation of these stanzas is to reinvent guns as flowers—a gesture not unlike the iconic image of 1960s antiwar activism in which a flower is placed in a gun barrel. Marvell's "flower power" *avant la lettre* is more radical than this, however, since the

⁹⁶ For similar reasons, I am unconvinced by T.S. Eliot's claim that Marvell is "more a man of the century than a Puritan, [who] speaks more clearly and unequivocally with the voice of his literary age than does Milton" (66). I am more interested in Marvell's idiosyncratic experimentalism than his representativeness.

miracle of peace seems more an achievement than a wish: every aspect of martial life has already been rendered botanical and thus nonviolent. Unlike the peacefulness of a military parade, which, as a demonstration of power, bears within it the threat of future violence, these botanical exercises are annulments of martial force.

Marvell's floral army grants him an opportunity to draw a connection between peace and receptivity. Picciotto has shown that, in the poem's subsequent meadows sequence, "the transformation of grass into glass correlates with the reformation of the fallen, sensitive body into a spectatorial one" (360). She goes on to explain that this collective agency of knowledge production hinges on a biblical precedent: "Since 'all flesh is grass' (Isaiah 40: 6), the poet's effort to transform the things of creation into instruments of truth begins with his own body—a body that...expands to include others" (360). Without offering a premature interpretation of the meadows sequence, it is worth noticing the epistemological consequences of the figural identification of grass, glass, and flesh in Picciotto's account. The expansion of the individual body by way of its integration with the environment (including others who work the land) makes it an "instrument of truth" capable of receiving stimuli that would otherwise remain obscured by private interest. But "flesh," of course, is also "grass" in the literal sense that it is cannon fodder, a body in need of burial, and finally fertile soil. The same vulnerability that exposes the body to death grants it the capacity to gaze upon the world with innocent eyes. Marvell's poem hinges on the double valence of vulnerability: the openness of experimentalist receptivity is also an openness to injury, which is why it is crucial that an atmosphere of peace envelops the text. The body's precariousness is its best chance for discovery.

The identification of dissimilar vulnerabilities is perhaps Marvell's most daring poetic gesture. Is it not shocking to suggest that the injury of the body (not merely an abstraction but a visceral reality for those who had endured the Civil War) resembles the stimulation of the body, which Marvell's poem celebrates? Is this not the figuration of bleeding wounds as delightfully receptive eyes and ears? My affirmative answers to these questions might seem less disturbing once I describe the theological seriousness of the poem's experimentalism—but they might not. Marvell's casual indifference actually permits an awareness so completely free from presuppositions that it discovers a cause for celebration in the body's capacity for suffering.

Marvell dismantles the armored self by figuring Nun Appleton as an inverted fortress. The apparatus of war has not simply been annulled by vegetation; it has been assimilated to an environment in which it is turned inside out. The fortress's function as a shield from the exterior has been inverted, by way of floral metaphors, so that its function is to welcome the foreign into its midst. In this way, the poem is a critique of war that disconcertingly avails itself of the insights of war—exploring a felicitous vulnerability exposed by violence.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ By now, it should be clear that I am not saying, as some critics have, that the poem is an apology for war. Abraham suggests that Marvell actually naturalizes warfare and celebrates its capacity to purify: "Since, according to stanza IV, man should follow the proportions and ways of nature as has been done at Appleton House, it follows that if nature is like war, and war like nature, then military action, while being a disturbing element, is only as disturbing as the necessary destruction or dying away that occurs before new growth in the natural world" (90). But experimentalism foregoes assumptions about what "nature" in general is like, which means nothing can be simply compared to "nature" without qualification—and certainly not bloodshed. For Marvell, in fact, warfare exposes the vulnerability of human bodies, which becomes an asset

It is common enough to notice that the gardens of Nun Appleton are arranged in the shape of a fortress, and that Marvell plays on this figure of the garden fortress in order to explore problems of war and peace (Turner speaks eloquently of “a retirement in which the very apparatus of war is pacific...”) but the link between the garden fortress and experimentalist receptivity has not been investigated (291). This is surprising, since Marvell explicitly identifies the “bastions” of the garden with the five senses. Sir Thomas Fairfax, he writes,

...when retirèd here to peace,
His warlike studies could not cease;
But laid these gardens out in sport
In the just figure of a fort;
And with five bastions it did fence,
As aiming one for ev’ry sense. (283-288)

The language of military defense is explicitly reversed, transforming self-protection into self-exposure. The rhyming of “fence” and “sense,” which sonically underscores the replacement of a defensive posture with a receptive one, correlates with the analogy that compares the “five bastions” to the five “sense[s]” (288). Turner is right that these “warlike studies” intend to “defeat the legacy of war,” but these lines treat such an act as a *fait accompli*, rather than a strategy the Fairfaxes need to be “taught.” After all, Marvell’s patron’s great grandfather is the subject of the long sentence that comprises the stanza; he built the bastions as analogues to the senses without the poet’s instruction. The garden is not a lesson but the accomplishment of a lesson, a figure for the conversion of instruments of war to those of peace—swords to microscopes, as I suggest below, rather than to ploughshares. Or perhaps, given Picciotto’s argument that, in this poem, “each instant of perception is infused with an awareness of the pains spent to produce it,” and that the knowledge of laborers is exactly the sort of maker’s knowledge experimentalist inquiry prizes, ploughshares need not be replaced by microscopes but simply figured as versions of them (359).

The conversion of the fortress into an instrument of receptivity by way of the medium of flowers (the natural world in general, but also *Upon Appleton House*, an instance of poesy—a poesy—itsself) is meticulously unfolded in the stanza immediately following the identification of the five “bastions” and the five “sense[s]”:

When in the east the morning ray
Hangs out the colours of the day,
The bee through these known allies hums,
Beating the *dian* with its drums.
Then flowers their drowsy eyelids raise,
Their silken ensigns each displays,
And dries its pan yet dank with dew,
And fills its flask with odours new. (289-296)

for experimental observation, but as a counter-vulnerability which is only possible under the conditions of peaceful cooperation it encourages.

Marvell's festive account of the dawn is a figure for the dawning of perception: the bestowal of light upon the world is also the activation of the eye and the quickening of the four other senses. The stanza draws attention to the sensory experience associated with dawn by exploring each of the senses in turn, so that mention of "ev'ry sense" at the end of the previous stanza immediately gives way to an enumeration of them. The "morning ray" that "Hangs out the colours of the day" in the first couplet appeals to the sense of sight, while the "bee" that "hums" and "beat[s]" the "drums" in the following one activates the reader's imagined sense of hearing. The flowers are depicted opening their eyes ("rais[ing]" their "drowsy eyelids") and unfurling their petals, as if they were raising flags in answer to the military drum-roll (the "*dian*"), thereby mimicking the speaker and the reader's newfound sensory attentiveness. The final couplet appeals to the senses of touch, smell, and taste. Every flower "dries its pan yet dank with dew," evoking the wetness of the petals, and then "fills its flask with odours new," offering the nose its particulate pleasures. Because this last of the flower's acts, like the others, answers the drum-roll of the bee, it can be understood as an offering of odoriferous nourishment to the jaunty insect: one cannot help but imagine the bee's proboscis sipping at its nectar.

At the very end of the garden sequence, Marvell presents the most compact image of this inversion, whereby the technology that keeps the foreign at a distance (by, for example, destroying it) begins to serve the opposite function. A gun-sight becomes a telescope or a beam of light, inspecting the objects it discovers rather than threatening their lives:

The sight does from these bastions ply,
Th'invisible artillery;
And at proud Cawood Castle seems
To point the batt'ry of its beams.
As if it quarrelled in the seat
Th'ambition of its prelate great.
But o'er the meads below it plays,
Or innocently seems to graze. (361-368)

The speaker mimes the violent inspection of the surroundings from the "bastion," including Cawood Castle, the former residence of the unpopular former Archbishop of York, John Williams, before the gun-sight "plays" "o'er the meads," where it "innocently seems to graze."⁹⁸ (Marvell here takes aim at Williams' infuriating form of moderation, an "ambition" to exert power by evading controversy—a good sign that the poem's carelessness should not be confused with mere political centrism.) One early manuscript has "gaze" instead of "graze," which makes the conversion of aiming (with a gun) into observing (with an attentive eye) as plain as day. But "graze," the more likely reading, accomplishes the same feat with more metaphoric complexity: the term refers to the shining of a beam of light, which works as a figure for vision, since the inspection of an object illuminates it.⁹⁹ The "meads" are exactly where the speaker goes in the next stanza, wandering through them and making observations about them, so that the "innocent" "graz[ing]" with which this stanza ends introduces the poem's subsequent movement and

⁹⁸ Williams "offended people of all parties (including Fairfax) in his aim of avoiding extreme policies" (Smith Longman 226n.366).

⁹⁹ As Smith points out, the verb is specifically used to speak "of a ray of light" (Longman 226n.368). See "to graze, v." (OED).

describes it ahead of time as an act of observation. When the poem turns to images of optical technology (which I discuss below), it is hard not to reimagine this stanza as the conversion of a gun-sight into a telescope, the transmutation of defensive violence into hyper-receptivity. On the other hand, because the original subject of the sentence is plain “sight,” which is only subsequently understood as a gun-sight, this stanza indicates that such conversions are not awaiting accomplishment but have in fact already been achieved. Just as the “warlike studies” were not lessons but efficacious instruments, vision is already innocent here—its corrupted form a point of comparison rather than a quandary from which the poet has to extricate himself.

The same section of the poem extends this pattern of imagery to the description of England as Eden, referring directly to the political sphere of war as a loss of innocence the poem itself has the capacity to undo. In the following lines, Marvell apostrophizes England in order both to lament its recent devastation and to suggest that the time for grief is over:

Oh thou, that dear and happy isle
The garden of the world ere while,
Thou Paradise of four seas,
Which heaven planted us to please,
But, to exclude the world, did guard
With wat’ry if not flaming sword;
What luckless apple did we taste,
To make us mortal, and thee waste? (321-329)

The “wat’ry...sword” seems both to protect England from a dangerous foreign “world” and exclude the English themselves from their native Paradise: the “tast[ing]” of the “luckless apple” confirms their exclusion. The “wast[ing]” of England—its exclusion from itself—can only refer to the recent history of civil war, as powerful a reminder as any of the “mortal[ity]” of both the nation and the human bodies that comprise it. And yet there is a wistful inquisitiveness in these lines that belies the fatalism they seem to convey. “What...apple?” is not the question it seems. If it asks after the literal cause of the “wast[ing]” away of England, then it asks for an answer the poem spells out in the preceding and following stanzas: these lines are located between, on one side, the conversion of soldiers and their weaponry to flowers, and on the other side, the following plaintive question about the end of war:

Shall we never more
That sweet militia restore,
When gardens only had their towers,
And all the garrisons were flowers,
When roses only arms might bear,
And men did rosy garlands wear? (329-334)

The pointed question names the cause of England’s “wast[ing]” and makes the earlier question (“What...apple?”) pointless—unless Marvell is making a more abstract, less urgent inquiry into the ultimate cause of violence itself. In that case, the question becomes wry and rhetorical rather than mournful. This reversal matches the self-canceling image of the “wat’ry...sword,” which refers, of course, to England’s status as an island, water seeming to do the work of exclusion that God’s flaming sword did at the gate of Paradise. The substitution ends up inverting the original

image, a fact already discernible in the conversion of fire to water—the former, in a sense, extinguished by the latter. Throughout this poem, water is a medium of inclusion. As I discuss below, water is run together with glass and grass in subsequent stanzas, becoming a medium of integration. The central event of the poem is a flood: water muddles together distinct environments. Ultimately, water’s “vitrifi[ca]tion” makes it an optical instrument capable of taking in the cosmos in its entirety (687). If England is separated from its Edenic self by a “wat’ry...sword,” then this is no separation at all. In this poem, to be enisled is to be promised communion with all creation: a medium of interconnection has arrived at one’s doorstep.

III. Carelessness as Receptivity

Marvell’s experiment in affect shapes the very structure of this famously wayward poem: its transitions, which link seemingly unrelated matters, often correspond with references to the speaker’s carelessness and to his location in a present tense in which receptivity intensifies. Conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs (“and then,” “but,” and “thus”) usually announce a shift in the speaker’s attention from one object to another while simultaneously marking a transition from a general account of a state of affairs to a description of a particular moment in time. As in “To His Coy Mistress,” Marvell establishes a close connection between carelessness, the present tense, and the power of grammatical conjunctions to integrate the distant and dissimilar. Also like the shorter poem, *Upon Appleton House* marks its most important utterances as careless turns of phrase, but this time it does so by way of *paralepsis* (“the figure by which a speaker emphasizes an idea by pretending to say nothing of it even while giving it full expression”) granting access to its climactic moment of apocalyptic vision (which, because of the poem’s tonal experiment, is actually an anticlimax) by suggesting that it is unworthy of mention (Preminger and Brogan 877).

The first instance of the first person singular occurs in stanza XLVII, which is also the first appearance of one of Marvell’s favored locutions, “and now” (which also introduces the climactic violence of the “am’rous birds of prey” in “To His Coy Mistress”—a violence swiftly reimagined, like the expulsion from Eden in this poem, as plenitude).¹⁰⁰ In other words, the introduction of the speaker himself, an agent of continuity who bridges distinct objects of inquiry, is also the introduction of a grammatical agent of continuity that draws attention to the present tense:

And now to the abyss I pass
Of that unfathomable grass... (369-370)

The poem repeats this “pass[age]” many times, the variegated grounds of Nun Appleton permitting a continual movement from one environment to another. The attachment of this “pass[age]” to the “I” is no accident (the words are separated by nothing more than a space), since the ecological diversity of Nun Appleton is only the most obvious instance of the poem’s general mode of address; this is a text in which the speaker, like the Montaigne who writes “Je parle au papier comme je parle au premier que je rencontre,” grants himself license to comment on whatever comes to mind and whatever comes into view (5). It is not only the “grass” that

¹⁰⁰ In fact, there is one prior instance, but it is not the *speaker’s* first person singular. The prioress uses the first person in the nunnery sequence at stanza XVIII.

deserves to be called “abyss[al]”: many of the objects that capture the speaker’s interest open out into vast domains that seem no less profound and limitless for having been discovered by accident. These lines also typify the correlation of the conjunction with a contraction of time, which is also, as in “To His Coy Mistress,” an expansion of the present moment. The discovery of a sea of “unfathomable” grass corresponds to the split-second in which the speaker moves from one landscape to another. The previous stanza, quoted above, describes the location of the estate, the interrelation of its parts, and the view the garden’s bastions afford of Cawood castle, while the conjunction contracts inward from the sweeping glance to a single moment in which the speaker’s body saunters both into the poem and into the meads.

Frequently, especially in the forest sequence, Marvell draws attention to the correlation of the conjunction (a grammatical conjunction or conjunctive adverb) with carelessness, making unmistakable the close connection between the speaker’s present movement (of body and thought) and his casual serenity.¹⁰¹

Then as I careless on the bed
Of gelid strawberries do tread... (529-30)

Thus I, easy philosopher,
Among the birds and trees confer... (561-2)

Then, languishing with ease, I toss
On pallets swoll’n of velvet moss... (593-4)

The parallels between these three couplets are instructive. Each is located at the very beginning of a stanza, which underscores its status as a transition. *Thus* and both *thens* are conjunctive adverbs, describing the “how” of the speaker’s movement while drawing a connection between what is happening now and what has gone before. In every case, Marvell has included an explicit marker of carelessness in the same line as the conjunction: he is “careless” in the first example and “easy” in the second, while he “languishes with ease” in the last. Finally, each of these couplets marks a passage from a broad description of a state of affairs to the speaker’s specific, momentary activity. The first couplet immediately follows an account of the “moan[ing]” of “stock-doves,” which hovers somewhere between Virgilian eclogue and the language of natural history, so that the speaker waxes pastoral and scientific simultaneously before interrupting those descriptive modes by narrating the specific activity of “tread[ing]” on “strawberries” (526, 523). The second couplet marks a similar transition from an account of an ecosystem in which trees are felled by “hewels” (woodpeckers) to the specific if quasi-mythic “confer[ence]” of the speaker with the surrounding wood (537). The final passage interrupts a sequence in which the environment absorbs the speaker (“The oak leaves me embroider all, / Between which caterpillars crawl: / And ivy, with familiar trails, / Me licks, and clasps, and curls, and hales” [587-90]) with the reassertion of the speaker’s body, the passivity of absorption reimagined as an

¹⁰¹ Although the thrust of Berger’s argument is contrary to mine, I have benefited from his observation that “...it is not *there* in the woods but *now* in the course of poetic utterance that Marvell lets go,” where letting go refers to the total abandon suggested by “languishing with ease” (“Green World” 313).

aspect of the speaker's emotional state: he who "languish[es] with ease" is overthrown by feeling.

Once one notices this pattern of conjunctions, which carelessly contract time into the present moment, its echoes—which are not exactly repetitions—can be heard throughout the poem. I explore some of these below, but one instance, which follows from the above discussion of the inverted fortress, serves as a useful illustration.

And now the careless victors play,
Dancing the triumphs of the hay... (425-6)

Once again, the locution "and now" introduces a "careless" mode of activity, but here it is not the speaker's. These lines do not contract inward to a single moment from a broader experience of observation, which means the "play" of the "victors" is only located in the present because the speaker says so: "And now." The stanza is continuous with the previous one, which means this couplet, unlike the three I compare above, does not bridge distinct fields of experience. The previous stanza is explicitly connected to the present ("The mower now commands the field...") and its final image dovetails smoothly with the activity of the "careless victors": "...Where, as the meads with hay, the plain / Lies quilted o'er with bodies slain: / The women that with forks it fling, / Do represent the pillaging" (418, 421-4). A poetics of carelessness cannot be a poetics of disciplined exactitude: the patterned deployment of the conjunction is not a strict rule but a habit, and one that leaves a mark on other passages in the poem that do not neatly instantiate the pattern. Here, for instance, the signature locution corresponds to the sort of figurative inversion of warfare discussed above—"pillaging" has metamorphosed into "the triumphs of the hay"—and is explicitly associated with "careless[ness]," but the temporal contraction and bridging of distinct realms of experience are nowhere to be found.

Taken together, these examples (both those that seem rigorously to follow a pattern and those that only reverberate with its echoes) clarify the status of carelessness as a form of hospitality to other emotional experiences. Of course, the underlying structure of the poem is the best argument for such hospitality, since a persistent mood of casual indifference accommodates the diverse experiences the speaker narrates.¹⁰² Moments of explicit insouciance are nonetheless instructive emblems of states of feeling that welcome other, seemingly incompatible ones. The "careless[ness]" of the "victors" who "[dance] the triumphs of the hay" makes a nice point of contrast with the "careless[ness]" of the speaker who "tread[s]" on "gelid strawberries," observing the behavior of birds with astonishment and praising the "hewel's wonders." In close succession, "careless[ness]" connotes carefree jubilation and the fascination of natural philosophical inquiry.

The remaining two examples blur experiences of "ease" into two distinct emotions, underlining the capaciousness of emotional tranquility. The "easy philosopher" stanza describes an ecstasy, the speaker's disposition sending his imagined self "floating on the air" and into an alternate vegetal body ("Or turn me but, and you shall see / I was but an inverted tree"), while the "languishing with ease" passage recounts a pleasurable weakness in which the speaker is not outside himself, communing with the natural world, but rather "annihilated" by it (566, 567-8).

¹⁰² James Turner's gloss anticipates my own interpretation: "Slow eyes and pleasant footsteps produce a vivid mixture of clarity and lethargy. Marvell represents the state of suspended wonder in which we discover things" ("Politics" 67).

Indeed, there is an astonishing transformation from activity to passivity in this quick transition from one form of “ease” to another: the self-satisfaction of one who shares the powers of the natural world but simply lacks the equipment to make them manifest (“wings,” the ability to stand on his head) becomes a masochistic pleasure—an enjoyment in being plundered and emptied out by an environment that “shed[s]” his “thoughts” (599). This last image is one of injury—and, of all the poem’s images of carelessness, the one that comes closest to displaying its structural principle. It is an emblem of what, from the perspective of modern scholarly discourse on the passions, is deeply unfamiliar about experimentalist affect: it involves a violation of the self that makes room for experience—any experience—and thus seems more akin to transformative pain (trauma, martyrdom) than the pleasures commonly associated with insouciance. Unlike those categories of suffering, however, it offers an unqualified welcome to other, dissimilar passions.

The anticlimactic apocalypse near the middle of the poem is the apotheosis of Marvell’s poetics of careless receptivity. Rosalie Colie has written insightfully about this moment, a threatening flood that turns out to do no damage. “In the developing poem,” she writes,

readers certainly think and feel catastrophe as the flood comes up over the land and the fish swim in the stables. It is somehow disturbing to realize that all this is *not* crucial, or that our emotional reactions to the evident meaning of the words used are continually undercut and undermined by what the poet does next, by the shifts of context and tone from one passage to its successor. (205)

Colie’s account brilliantly explains the disorienting consequences, for the reader, of a “catastrophe” that is, for the world within the poem, utterly without consequence. For that world, it is an anticlimax, a flood that “[re]fresh[es]” the meadow rather than harming it, and one in which no one dies or even struggles for life (some cows are briefly “isl[ed]” and only “the river in itself is drowned” [626, 472, 471]). But perhaps Marvell’s poetics grants the reader an opportunity *not* to experience the unexpected as “disturbing”: since carelessness is the mood in which the poem’s unexpected transitions happen—since it is, in fact, an affective gateway to the unexpected—such an outcome might be taken as a matter of course.

Indeed, there are other reasons Colie’s expectation of catastrophe might not be shared by readers: because Marvell figures the flowing grass as flowing water several stanzas earlier, the flood seems much less threatening than it otherwise might (“To see men through this meadow dive, / We wonder how they rise alive. / As, under water, none does know / Whether he fall through it or go” (376-80)).¹⁰³ A figurative flood precedes a literal one. Moreover, in a poem replete with hallucinatory visions, the topsy-turvydom of the flood comes as no surprise. On the other hand, the power it holds derives not from the apocalyptic overtones of flooding as a Christian *topos*, but from the gathering force of the poem’s metamorphic power: the vertiginous distortion of the world for which this poem is famous reaches its apogee as the flood merges water and land. The consequences of the flood are not the ones expected of floods, but they are no less consequential. This is a poem in which knowing what to expect—even in expectation of the unexpected—itself becomes untenable. As the reader progresses, she loses the coordinates of anticipation that would justify a vocabulary of climax and anticlimax.

¹⁰³ The prominence of the “rail” contributes to this effect, since the term might refer to the land-rail or water-rail, which makes its home in the meadow ambiguously aquatic (stanzas L-LIII).

Carelessness, in the form of *paralepsis*, permits a casual apocalypse. At the literal and dramatic height of the flood, the poem indicates that its most excessive vision of a world turned upside down is beneath its dignity—even though the reader, having passed through 59 of 97 stanzas, knows by this late stage that such inversion is at the center of Marvell’s project. Such is the rhetoric of *paralepsis*: the speaker admits these hallucinatory images into the poem by describing them as less than worthy of admission. In this way, they seem to be accidentally, carelessly, included—mentioned almost by accident by a speaker who wishes to pass them by. Once more, nonchalance is a form of receptivity—even to whatever the speaker wishes to exclude from his verse. His jaunty enumeration of supernatural phenomena contributes to the effect, suggesting they are trivial in the very moment in which he inscribes them in the text:

Let others tell the paradox,
How eels now bellow in the ox;
How horses at their tails do kick,
Turned as they hang to leeches quick;
How boats can over bridges sail;
And fishes do the stables scale.
How salmons trespassing are found;
And pikes are taken in the pound. (473-480)

The *paraleptic* moment is an emblem of carelessness as receptivity. The speaker claims he will “let others tell” about these fantastical transformations, but “tell[s]” about them himself in the act of making this claim. It is only by way of a casual disregard for these wonders that they make their way into the poem. Aquatic creatures take up residence on land (eels in the belly of the ox, all manner of fish in the “stables” and the “pound”), while land animals are rendered aquatic (the horse’s tail transforms into a leech). In a poem in which perspective is constantly in flux (most famously, “grasshoppers are giants” atop the “spires” of the tall grasses), the “sail[ing]” of “boats...over bridges” renders that phenomenon elemental: two distinct environments trade places, water over land (372, 376).

IV. Blurred Apocalypse: Optical Effects of Marvell’s Insouciance

The most influential experimentalist account of microscopy would not be published until 1665 (the same year as Boyle’s *Occasional Reflections*), but Robert Hooke’s description of a drone fly’s eye in *Micrographia* is a felicitous illustration of the experimentalist aspirations of *Upon Appleton House*: “A Fly may be truly said to have *an eye every way*, and to be really *circumspect*” (176). Marvell treats lens technology as if it were closer to the insect’s compound eye than the microscope as Hooke employs it. “I took a large grey *Drone-Fly*,” Hooke writes, “that had a large head, but a small and slender body in proportion to it, and cutting off its head, I fix’d it with the forepart or face upwards upon my Object Plate” (175). Marvell’s optical technologies do not “fix” “Objects” in order to examine them—and certainly not by “cutting off [their] head[s].” On the contrary, this is a poem in which nothing is “fix’d,” and in which the promise of optics, like that of peaceful carelessness, is to multiply the speaker’s exposure to stimuli rather than to clarify his apprehension of a single one. Marvell’s many lenses are figures

of a wish “to have *an eye every way*”—to inundate the self in sensations that unassisted observation could never supply.

Critics have often drawn a contrast between the poem’s world-in-flux and its scientific points of reference, but in fact these are in harmony. Berger writes: “Marvell’s experiments are...not marked by the scientific ideal of ‘objectivity.’ His *indecus* behavior in the forest mocks the very order—sober, constrained, and neat—which protects him from the world” (300). Berger’s account might be fruitfully recoded in the manner of Hooke’s “circumspect[ion]”: what looks like self-protection is in fact a form of self-exposure. Since, in this period, “the scientific ideal of ‘objectivity’” was itself in the process of formation, it is hard to know what it would mean for “Marvell’s experiments” to be straightforwardly “marked” by it. How are we to measure the imprint of an ideal that cannot yet be said to have taken a definite shape? In any case, Marvell’s interest in science actually ensures his sensuous abandon; his experimentalism encourages the wayward use of optical technologies—the production of a phantasmagoria of sensory experiences that bear no trace of the “sober, constrained, and neat.”

Marvell’s “multiplying glasses” “multiply” experience, making the sensorium a theater of unexpected sensation. Just as “To His Coy Mistress” imagines a careless receptivity so expansive it includes sensations from other points in time, including the End Times, *Upon Appleton House* follows the (anti-)apocalypse of the flood with an Apocalypse of hyper-receptivity in which past, present, and future intermix. The lens is the technological analogue of experimentalist affect, sharing its power to curate otherwise impossible perceptual experiences. I here conclude my discussion of the poem by showing that such power suggests a new understanding of experimental observation—one which maximizes the multiplicity of experience rather than minimizing ‘distraction’ in order to isolate individual phenomena for disciplined inspection.

One of the obstacles to understanding the function of optics in *Upon Appleton House* is Marvell’s habit of running his metaphors together, creating a seamless flow of figuration not unlike the flowing movement of the speaker’s observations—from one environment to another, one emotion to another, and so on. As I indicate in my commentary on the inverted fortress, grass becomes glass, but grass also extends the botanical imagery of the garden sequence. (Indeed, all botanical phenomena seem linked in a single network of lively vegetal activity.) As I explain in my discussion of paralepsis, grass also figures water, so that when the river floods the meadow, it seems only to flood a flood, figuratively speaking. Optical technologies are part of this figural chain, since water too is rendered glasslike. Such a lengthy chain of equivalences poses a challenge to interpretation: garden = grass = water = glass = optics. By what principle, one wonders, are these figures organized? Perhaps, since the wandering movement of the poem itself resembles that of the river that runs through Nun Appleton and overflows in its (anti-) climactic flood narrative, each metaphor is an echo of that winding waterway. Perhaps, since the meadows are a scene of labor, and Picciotto has shown Marvell’s interest in reversing the tradition of country-house poems that “focus relentlessly on festive consumption” by “direct[ing] the reader’s gaze” instead “to the processes of production,” the grassy mead should instead be seen as the center of the poem, repeatedly echoed by water, glass, and the natural philosopher’s lens (356). In the end, however, it is surely reductive to insist on a hierarchy of figures: one would do better to follow the poem’s lead in sliding from one domain to another without granting pride of place to any.

Marvell, for his part, seems to have it both ways. On the one hand, the poem encourages a horizontal rather than vertical sort of reading—a casual movement between figures that seems to discourage synthesis. On the other hand, Marvell seems to grant optical imagery pride of

place, since it hyperbolizes the poem's horizontal movement from one realm to another; the capacity of the microscope to bring images from a different world into this one models Marvell's sustained attempt to make the absent present and thus to maximize exposure to stimuli. For Marvell, the interpenetration of the microscopic and the plainly visible is more interesting than a precise account of what lies on the other side of the threshold of perception. Marvell makes both the stanza in which optics explicitly appears and the optical "vitrifi[cation]" that attends the appearance of Maria Fairfax portals to other parts of the poem, linking the lens with the breadth of experience his poetics makes available (687). He also draws attention to the function of optical technology by gradually building toward images of glass, notwithstanding the poem's meandering movement. Grass becomes river before river becomes glass, so that the speaker's amble through pastoral and georgic spaces ends up transforming them into the transparent pane of the lens. Over the course of the process whereby Marvell's fluid world hardens into glass, the speaker makes continual mention of the intermingling of distinct spaces, but it is only in the two moments where the lens is most at issue that Marvell actually wields the combinatory power he elsewhere simply attributes to it.

Pace the familiar intellectual history that understands the emergence of objectivity primarily as an effort to establish epistemological certainty, this poem prizes the natural philosopher's gaze for its capacity to reveal new worlds of perception—even at the price of confusion. For Marvell, I suggest, experimental observation promises to reveal myriad interconnected worlds rather than to verify the irrefutable truth of its discoveries. Breadth of receptivity trumps clarity of object: vision blurs at the moment of its expansion. Such an understanding of natural philosophical observation—which privileges experimental practice over its findings—valorizes a form of open-ended inquiry, the opacity of objects serving not as a sign of failure but as proof that they are worthy of endless contemplation. Such an observational style is most visible in the poem's forest sequence, which is far too often read as a lapse, a moment of error, or a parody of an epistemology the poem rejects.¹⁰⁴ In fact, the speaker's errancy and perplexity as he ambles through the woodlands are exemplary of the poem's experimentalist modesty; they are also the closest the poem comes to depicting the natural philosopher's practice of observation.

Marvell makes explicit reference to optics in stanza LVIII, where several technologies of vision blur together, signaling a rare moment of critical reflection on what Picciotto calls "perceptual disorientation" (360) This is the only stanza in which every single couplet alludes at least once to another of the poem's passages, so that these 8 lines function much like the technologies they describe, bringing the distant and intangible within the speaker's reach. He observes cattle in the meadow and describes them as follows:

They seem within the polished grass
A landskip drawn in looking-glass.
And shrunk in the huge pasture show
As spots, so shaped, on faces do.
Such fleas, ere they approach the eye,
In multiplying glasses lie.

¹⁰⁴ Picciotto reads the forest sequence ironically, as a scene of hermetic or magical knowledge production that stands in opposition to the experimentalism the poem generally promotes and enacts ("Labors" 362).

They feed so wide, so slowly move
As constellations do above. (457-64)

The initial comparison might refer to a painting on a mirrored background,¹⁰⁵ or simply to the reflection of a landscape in a mirror, which would then only be “drawn” there in a metaphorical sense. Either way, this “looking-glass” transforms into other “glass[es]” for various kinds of “looking.” The distant cows are like “fleas” in “multiplying glasses,” the latter term invoking the microscope, though recent scholarship suggests it might also point elsewhere—to (1) “short tubes in which fleas were trapped between a plate of glass and a small, thick glass lens,” or (2) “a lens with many flat facets ground onto its convex, thereby giving many reflections of the object viewed” (Smith, Longman 230n.462). The first is basically a rudimentary microscope, while the second mimics what Hooke will later call “circumspect[ion]”—the poem’s own *raison d’être*.

The stanza is a compressed vision of the remainder of the poem. Following the logic whereby the lens is prized for the breadth rather than the clarity of the experiences it makes available, these lines enact both a massive optical distortion and the rapid incorporation of the poem’s multitudinous contents. The distortion achieves the effect of true “disorientation”: the cows take the simultaneously redundant and defamiliarizing form of cow-shaped “spots” on “faces” (“spots, so shaped”) before transforming analogically into fleas, after which their “wide” “feed[ing]” comes into view, as if in close-up. Marvell’s dizzying optical effects are magnified by the intersection of technologies (two kinds of mirrors, the microscope, the flea chamber, the refracting glass), creating a compact textual space that expands to contain the rest of the poem—an effect, like that of the afterthought in “To His Coy Mistress,” that only becomes visible upon rereading. The cattle who appear pronominally in the stanza’s first word recall the reference to the “graz[ing]” of the eye from the bastion in stanza XLVI (368). Marvell’s cows are usually taken as figures of fun—comprising an image that mocks Davenant’s *Gondibert*, rendering him ridiculous by situating him in the “herd”—but the repeated association of “slow[ness]” with the sort of casual observation Marvell practices throughout (“While with slow eyes we these survey, / And on each pleasant footstep stay, / We opportunely may relate / That progress of the house’s fate”), and the association of “graz[ing]” with the same calm ocular attention from the garden’s bastion suggests that rumination, in a specifically bovine sense, is a good figure for the speaker’s activity (456, 81-4). The serene receptivity of the experimentalist’s eye is not unlike the tranquil “graz[ing]” of the cow, gently working the earth with its mouth: “They feed so wide, so slowly move,” Marvell writes, “As constellations do above.”

The stanza’s opening description of the cows in “polished grass” points forward to the “vitri[fi]cation” of the concluding section of the poem, while the “constellations” at the end of the stanza point back to the “vigilant patrol” of “stars...about the pole” in the garden sequence (312-13). In this way, the stanza begins by pointing forward and ends by pointing backward. The two middle couplets refer to Nun Appleton’s past—the narrative, recounted in stanzas XII to XXXV, of Isabel Thwaites’ imprisonment in and rescue from the nunnery that used to occupy one of the buildings of the estate. The resemblance of the cows on the grass to “spots...on faces” recalls the nuns’ attention to Isabel’s unblemished face: “But much it to our work would add / If here your hand, your face we had,” one of the nuns explains, luring Isabel into the convent (129-30). The nuns treat the face as a sign of purity, an indication of the body’s constitution in both a

¹⁰⁵ Smith notes that these “were fashionable in the mid-seventeenth century” (Longman 230n.458).

physiological and moral sense. As one of the nuns puts it, “And holy-water of our tears, / Most strangely our complexion clears,” so that the word “complexion” binds together the appearance of the face and the balance of the humors, both of which are “clear[ed]” by penitence (111-12). The cows’ subsequent resemblance to “fleas” recalls the conclusion of the nunnery sequence, when William Fairfax rescues Isabel by “waving these [the nuns’ metaphorical weapons, which are actually just sacred objects and their seductive “lungs” and “tongues”] aside like flies” (257, 255, 256). The slide of the vowel sound from “flea” to “fly” is like the liquid trill by which “grass” becomes “glass.” Because the “vitrifi[cation]” implied by the blurring together of “polished grass” and glass refers to the poem’s climactic apocalypse (as opposed to the anticlimax of the flood), the stanza succeeds at pointing not only to the *poem*’s past and future (earlier and later sequences), but to the *historical* and *eschatological* past and future (the nunnery as a sign of the former corruption of the faith, the future of the Fairfax line in Maria as a sign of apocalyptic transparency). Like carelessness—and indeed, by virtue of the carelessly inclusive manner in which it is deployed—the lens grants access to an apocalyptic present in which past and future intermingle.

The poem frequently refers to such intermingling without generating the intra-textual allusions of stanza LVIII. Instead, it simply suggests that it is a salutary power of reflective and magnifying glasses. For instance, in stanza LXXX, the river

its muddy back doth lick,
Till as a crystal mirror slick;
Where all things gaze themselves, and doubt
If they be in it or without. (635-38)

It is a sensuous act of perceptual delectation—“lick[ing]”—that creates the optical effect of the (con)fusion of the terrestrial and the aquatic.¹⁰⁶ Stanza LXXXVI gives the Nun Appleton estate the capacity to generate such effects, implicitly identifying it with the optic the poem itself seems to represent:

Tis not, what once it was, the world;
But a rude heap together hurled;
All negligently overthrown,
Gulfs, deserts, precipices, stone.
Your lesser world contains the same,
But in more decent order tame;
You, heaven’s centre, Nature’s lap.
And Paradise’s only map. (761-8)

¹⁰⁶ Abraham refers to this (con)fusion as the creation of a “microcosm,” which is a nice emblem of Marvell’s poetics, as long as the premise of neat cosmic analogies implied by that figure is replaced by experimentalist modesty (203). Just as a microcosm manages to embrace the cosmos despite its smallness, Marvell’s eschatological moments seek to encompass divine and earthly realms with a single experimental glance. It is as if the microcosm no longer consists of micro-phenomena that correspond to other ones, but instead refers to a magnifying glass that actually makes those other phenomena visible.

The corruption of the world sounds like a consequence of carelessness, for it is “negligently overthrown.” Not everything careless is to be prized. The speaker’s casual indifference enables the poetic transformation of Nun Appleton into a “map” of “Paradise,” which seems to promise the renovation of its surroundings.¹⁰⁷ Since the poem is nothing other than an experience of the estate, it here stakes its claim to the apocalyptic powers of optical technology.

These references complement the one stanza in which “multiplying glasses” actually compress the whole meandering poem into the brief experience of eight lines, establishing a pattern of optical integration and inclusiveness that clarifies the stakes of that astonishing moment. The poem’s only other instance of such compression both recalls this same effect of intermingling and places a new emphasis on the blurring of vision that attends it. The appearance of Maria Fairfax renders the cosmos optical, turning everything to glass¹⁰⁸:

She yet more pure, sweet, straight, and fair,
Than gardens, woods, meads, rivers are. (695-6)

The meticulous inverted parallelism of these terms (a sort of syntactical palindrome), with the sequence of adjectives referring in reverse order to the sequence of nouns,¹⁰⁹ calls the reader’s attention to the formal structure of the poem.¹¹⁰ Once the reader has reassembled these terms—pure rivers, sweet meads, straight woods, fair gardens—the reflection on structure required by that reassembly has increased the likelihood of her noticing the couplet’s recapitulative effect. Maria is not simply an apotheosis of the virtuous properties of the natural world, but of exactly those natural environments the poem itself has traversed. The distinct spaces that comprise the poem suddenly come back into view in the speaker’s description of Maria.

As in “To His Coy Mistress,” Marvell’s afterthoughts (his casual turns of phrase) are after-thoughts (thoughts of the hereafter): Maria’s peaceful presence unveils the world of appearances by placing it under the lens, interrupting the temporal world with the “flames” of the eschaton. The stanza in which the recapitulative couplet appears immediately follows two stanzas in which Maria, a composite of experimentalist virtue (her “judicious eyes” cause “Nature” to “recollect” “itself,” calm vision calling the natural world to attention) brings about the merger of observer and observed, the instrument of observation fusing with the world under scrutiny (653, 657-8). In these lines, the perspective broadens to include the cosmos as all its contents are transfigured through experimentalist intervention (the feminine pronoun in the opening lines refers to the halcyon, but also, as the subsequent stanza suggests, to Maria):

¹⁰⁷ For Abraham, this too is a “microcosm” (231). See ff. 40.

¹⁰⁸ Rosalie Colie’s interpretation of this sequence overlaps with my own, and links *Upon Appleton House* to my reading of “To His Coy Mistress”: “That static moment [“the last episode in the poem”], isolated from the flux of past and future time, is, however, deeply connected to the other moments, other times of the active, swirling day of the poem. In the poem as a whole, time-schemes are peculiarly disturbed; time itself is pleated, skipped, metamorphosed, fused in various ways” (251).

¹⁰⁹ One speaks of *vers rapportés* in French poetry of the period. Smith’s term is *versus rapportati* (Longman 239n.695-6).

¹¹⁰ The list itself is repeated a few stanzas below, still in connection with Maria’s divine powers: “woods, streams, gardens, meads” (752).

The viscous air, wheres'e'er she fly,
 Follows and sucks her azure dye;
 The jellying stream compacts below,
 If it might fix her shadow so;
 The stupid fishes hang, as plain
 As flies in crystal overta'en;
 And men with silent scene assist,
 Charmed with the sapphire-wingèd mist.

Maria such, and so doth hush
 The world, and through the ev'ning rush.
 No new-born comet such a train
 Draws through the sky, nor star new-slain.
 For straight those giddy rockets fail,
 Which from the putrid earth exhale,
 But by her flames, in heaven tried,
 Nature is wholly vitrified. (673-88)

The final image invokes the vision of apocalypse in Revelation 15:2 in which a “sea of glass” is “mingled with fire”—to say nothing of other biblical versions of apocalypse in which everything (not only the sea) is turned to glass on the Day of Judgment.¹¹¹ Since these apocalyptic “flames” are “her[s],” Maria appears as an agent of divine judgment who transforms everything, without exception, to glass: “Nature is wholly vitrified.”¹¹² But this apocalypse is not St. John’s: it derives from the poem’s interest in the capacity of emotional peace to generate receptivity. The speaker contrasts Maria’s ability to “hush / The world” with the spectacular violence of “new born comet[s]” and “star[s] new-slain,” and he underscores the difference between the “train” of soothing pacification she carries through the world and the pyrotechnics of meteors—which are termed “giddy rockets,” perhaps with gentle disdain.

Marvell exalts the power of glass to blur rather than to clarify—which is nearly the opposite of Hooke’s assurance that the microscope makes its otherwise invisible objects “plain and evident” (175). Smith glosses the “crystal” in which “flies” are “overta’en” in Marvell’s analogy as “amber,” but it seems likely, given the “vitrifi[cation]” the passage describes and the poem’s experimentalist ethos, that the term refers also to the glass of the lens, through which Hooke was studying flies while Marvell composed these lines (Longman 239n.678). The “stupid fishes” for which these “flies in crystal” are figures have been rendered “plain” by a glassy environment, and yet the speaker is unequivocal about the foginess of the transparent medium. The “air” is “viscous” and the “stream” is “jellying,” so that both media become spaces *between* media—air-glass and water-glass—and their contents seem to waver between movement and stasis. The blue of the halcyon’s feathers bleed into the atmosphere (the “air...suck[ing] her azure dye”) until it seems more wet than dry, a “sapphire-wingèd mist.” This last image blurs the halcyon together with its environment, the “mist” itself bearing “sapphire” “wing[s].” The stanza conjures forth not only air-glass and water-glass, but mist-glass (that is, air-water-glass) and

¹¹¹ See Smith Longman (239n.687).

¹¹² Stocker points out that the halcyon is a “symbol of peace,” echoing “the character of Christ as the Prince of Peace,” so that this sequence also enacts a Second Coming (60).

ultimately the fusion of an object with its surroundings (bird-air-water-glass, an undifferentiated composite). Since blurring is a consequence of “vitrifi[cation],” Marvell suggests that the blurring of the field of vision is also the blurring together of the instrument and object of observation—the lens and the fly, for example. In this way, optical technology—with its power of apocalyptic unveiling—seems to render the world both “plain” and hazy, effecting a torsion of perception that blurs the edges of things while bringing the invisible into view (fish once hidden by rushing water, for instance).

In this way, Marvell’s emphasis falls on experimentalism’s promise of receptivity rather than certainty—on the rejection of foreknowledge in the interest of an encounter with the unknown. The coordination of optical technology and multidirectional self-exposure (to all of the created world, including all that is past and future) derives from this preference for breadth rather than clarity of vision. The poem’s two moments of “circumspect[ion]” embrace the world without encouraging the isolation of any single phenomenon. The speaker’s journey through the forest¹¹³ is the poem’s clearest emblem of this hazy receptivity: “Dark all without it knits; within / It opens passable and thin,” and yet the speaker’s experience within this newly available world is mainly one of incomprehension. He describes his observations of creatures and his eroticized exploration of woodland flora without seeming to glean knowledge from those experiences. His account quickly allegorizes the behavior of birds rather than seeking to observe their properties: the hewer’s (woodpecker’s) felling of a tree is translated into a mercy killing, since the tree’s death coincides with that of the “traitor-worm” within; and a “heron” “lets drop” “the eldest of its young....As if it stork-like did pretend / That tribute to its Lord to send,” so that one bird’s behavior is said only to resemble that of another, itself anthropomorphized as it pays tribute to the lord of the estate by sacrificing its chick (537, 554, 533-6). When the speaker “confer[s]” with “birds and trees,” he speaks to them in an inoperative language, but one that fails to faze him, suggesting an intimacy with the natural world predicated on its opacity:

Already I begin to call
In their most learned original:
And where I language want, my signs
The bird upon the bough divines;
And more attentive there doth sit
Than if she were with lime-twigs knit.
No leaf does tremble in the wind
Which I returning cannot find. (569-576)

¹¹³ Colie is insightful on this sequence: ““Marvell plays with what might be called the affective aspect of philosophy—for instance, in the limpid relaxation-ecstasy of “The Garden,” where the poet effortlessly annihilates all that’s made and creates new worlds and seas, or in the ecstatic realizations of the wood episode in “Upon Appleton House,” where readers are let in on the extraordinary psychological freedom of creative inspiration. It is the *experience* of understanding, not its processes, which is presented to us: we are allowed to experience how inspiration works to transform the commonplace into the significantly rare....” (298). My interest is not “inspiration,” but Colie’s vocabulary of the “commonplace” and the “rare” points to the phenomenon I explore under the rubric of Experimentalist estrangement: the discovery of the unfamiliar within the bounds of a world that at first seems legible enough.

An experimentalist poem has brought its speaker face-to-face with the natural world without granting him the quality of understanding that would render it legible. The speaker claims to speak an Adamic language, the ur-language of nature, but immediately admits that his “language” is “want[ing].” The bird, rather than the speaker, displays the characteristics of the experimentalist (just as, according to my own metaphor, the drone fly is more of a Marvellian experimentalist than Hooke seems to be): the bird displays “attentive[ness]” and “divines” the gestures of the speaker, which have to substitute for language. And yet the speaker’s claim that he knows every leaf in this wood—there is “no leaf” he “cannot find” upon “returning”—suggests an intimacy with the environment that does not require understanding. This is the dream of Marvell’s experimentalism: under the gentle pressure of a careless disposition, a not-yet-comprehensible world reveals itself, “passable and thin.”

Carelessness and the lens share this virtue: they expose the observer to worlds of mysterious phenomena that normally hide beneath the threshold of perception. For this reason, images of optical technology present an appropriate figurative language for Marvell’s poetics of casual indifference, and the coordination of these two realms doubly enriches the tradition of Baconian affect. First, more than ever before, muted emotion is a passageway to other emotions: carelessness grants universal entry to the passions. Second, this gesture of unrestricted welcome places a new emphasis on a world confusingly unfolding into other worlds rather than the narrow but crystal-clear perception of a single object—a science of the arabesque rather than what Hooke called, on the first page of *Micrographia*, the “Mathematical *point*.”

In this way, *Upon Appleton House* is an instructive record of a dimension of experimentalism that contravenes those aspects of it that are more easily assimilated to narratives of the origins of modern science. When experimentalist affect is understood as rigorous indifference, it is easy to square with an interest in undistracted clarity of view; on this understanding, scientific dispassion ensures the credibility of experimental findings. For Marvell, on the other hand, experimentalism is an ethos of carelessness, a casual freedom from passion that grants access to new experiences without ensuring their trustworthiness. Marvell’s apocalypse of gracefully borne but wild sensation is a reminder of an overlooked dimension of mid-century experimentalism—the presence of which in other experimentalist texts has the effect of fissuring them in two.

Hooke’s assertion, for instance, that one should begin one’s studies with the “most simple and uncompounded bodies”—of which a “physical point” is the natural historical version of geometry’s “Mathematical point”—soon gives way to the observation that the “point of a sharp small Needle” is not a point at all, but an “*irregular and uneven*” surface “big enough to have afforded a hundred armed Mites room enough to be rang’d by each other without endangering the breaking one anothers necks, by being thrust off on either side” (2). There is, it turns out, no such thing as a “physical point”—at least not under Hooke’s microscope—and that discovery occasions bizarre reflections that seem to flout the ideal of clarity: “an hundred armed Mites”! The alternation between philosophical dictum and imaginative illustration, between the sober desire for precision and the whimsical embrace of possibility, instantiates a tension at the heart of experimentalism—the wayward side of which Marvell’s insouciant poetics brings into focus.

Chapter 4

“None Opposite”: Undialectical Milton

I am a brother to dragons, and a companion to owls.
—Job 30: 29

In the imagination of seventeenth-century Englishmen and women, the Stoic and the Jew share moral qualities, both standing as figures of “obstinacy” and “hardness of heart.” Sometimes, this resemblance shades into complete identification, as in the following lines from Baptist Goodall’s *The Tryall of Travell* (1630), a long poetic paean to maritime mobility:

The Stoic Jewe loves of the Christians learne
And wee in them frugallity discern
The Could dull northerne practize westerner witt
And they a true plaine hartedness in it. (11)

Goodall describes his “Jewe” as “Stoic” without having to explain why; that Jews are cold and obdurate is well known, and “Stoic” is a byword for those qualities. More interesting than the conflation of these figures is Goodall’s subsequent example of mutual intercultural education, which associates England itself with the Jewish cold-heartedness the previous couplet warms with Christian “love.” These four lines comprise a chiasmus, placing emphasis on the resemblance of England and its Other. As Jews learn “love” from Christians (the English, say), the “Could dull northerne” (say, the English) discover quickness of “witt” in their “westerner” counterparts (Mediterraneans); the poem thus aligns the phlegmatic Englishman with the “Stoic Jewe,” suggesting that both would benefit from heat—that of the Christian heart or the Italian tongue.¹¹⁴

Rhetorically, the interest of Goodall’s language lies in its logic of unexaggerated distinction—what this chapter explores under the rubric of “soft differences.” The “Stoic Jewe” is clearly “other”—his cold heart a moral failing in Christian eyes—and yet the poet blithely aligns himself and his countrymen with the reprobate, as if otherness were no great obstacle to comparison. The Jew is different from the Christian, but he is no monstrous Other.¹¹⁵ Such is the logic of everyday distinctions: X is different from Y without being anathema to it.

In the seventeenth century, the figures of the Stoic and the Jew hold a special power to elicit the rhetoric of soft differences. They exemplify a sin that barely differs from righteousness. As Thomas Browne says of the Jews’ refusal to convert, “This is a vice in them, that were a virtue in us; for obstinacy in a bad cause, is but constancy in a good” (36). The encrypted constancy of Stoics and Jews makes them especially interesting for a culture in which “constancy” is only one name for a deep-rooted ethos of “moderation” (“constancy” suggesting

¹¹⁴ See Floyd-Wilson (“Ethnicity”) for more on the geography of the humors.

¹¹⁵ As a Jew writing about Christian anti-Semitism, I am well aware of the reality of virulent hatred in this historical moment, and of the gruesome caricatures one can find throughout the English literary tradition. My interest in this chapter is a less venomous form of anti-Semitism, but I do not suggest that it is more visible or prominent than the others.

the persistence in time of “moderation’s” resistance to ideological and emotional “extremes”).¹¹⁶ In this chapter, my focus is the specific cultural context in which figures of both Stoicism and Judaism proliferate and assume positions of privilege—the sphere of experimentalism. Because constancy is of special importance to Baconians, for whom insight depends on emotional tranquility, they display a particular interest in figures of perseverance. Experimentalists relate to Stoicism and Judaism without total identification or complete marginalization, without inflating their virtues or their vices.

The argument of the previous three chapters offers several points of departure for thinking about the affective, ethical, and epistemological consequences of soft differences. Montaigne’s “emotional pacifism,” which favors a temperamental disinclination to violence over a disciplined refusal to fight, places distance between the essayist and the *guerres civiles* without abandoning the celebration of martial valor. Bacon’s habit of redeploying metaphors associated with the schoolmen in the midst of refuting scholastic dogma, rather than, say, cultivating a new and distinct vocabulary, similarly marries comparison and differentiation. Boyle’s abandonment of “method” in the guise of a merely momentary postponement, along with Marvell’s poetry of nonviolence, which attends to military spectacle rather than banishing it from sight, round out the “subplot” of my argument. If the “main plot” recounts the epistemological advantages discovered by experimentalists in states of careless awareness, the subplot traces the poetics of soft differences through the histories of science, poetry, and the emergent “essay” form.

In this concluding chapter, I take up the example of John Milton in order to clarify how plot relates to subplot. I argue that *Paradise Regain’d* (1671) cultivates a poetics of soft differences, the affective corollary of which is carelessness. I propose that the well-known debt of Milton’s “brief epic” to the Book of Job places it in conversation with experimentalist discussions of Stoicism and Judaism. Steadfast Job can be read as a version of the “Stoic Jewe,” and his story offers a model for Milton’s poem—though not the one other scholars suggest. My discussion first describes experimentalist encounters with figures of obstinacy, then offers a reading of the Book of Job on the basis of those encounters, and finally interprets Milton’s poem as a response to Jobean soft differences.

As I suggest above, the logic of soft differences resembles the simplest and most banal of cognitive processes: making casual distinctions between things. The power of Milton’s poem derives from its disarming simplicity, which retains its capacity to disarm even (or especially) in our own intellectual context. Milton and other experimentalists present a genuinely unfamiliar way of thinking about difference, even if it is something we do all the time without thinking about it. We think about difference without thinking about our thinking. And “difference,” since the rise of poststructuralism in literary studies, and in spite of its apparent eclipse, remains central to the discourse of the humanities. It should come as no surprise that experimentalism seeks to generate disarming simplicity: it defines itself by the interruption of scholastic logic with the findings of firsthand observation. What surprises is its capacity to cast a new light on our own rhetoric of difference.

A poetics of soft differences is an alternative to the logic of the constitutive exclusion, a lasting paradigm of humanistic inquiry. The constitutive exclusion might be summarized as follows: X establishes its identity by rejecting Y, making the identity of X dependent on Y. For

¹¹⁶ See Shagan for a highly suspicious account of the coercive force of moderation in early modern England. See Scodel for a sensitive discussion of the flexibility with which the rhetoric of moderation is deployed in the period’s literary texts, including *Paradise Lost*.

this reason, Y relentlessly haunts and disrupts the identity of X, even as it grants it life. According to this model, an identity is both constituted and deformed by whatever it seems to cast off. Janet Adelman's sensitive exploration of *The Merchant of Venice* offers a good example, taking up the specific issue that interests me here: Christianity's relationship to Judaism. Adelman writes of "Christianity's simultaneous dependence on its literal and theological lineage in Judaism and its guilty disavowal of that inheritance...its chronic need both to claim and to repudiate the Jew" (4). On this understanding, Christianity emphatically *rejects* Judaism, but it *cannot* do away with it; it banishes the Jew it finds itself having simultaneously to accept as part of its history. Here and elsewhere, the constitutive exclusion implies necessity. Christianity "depend[s]" on Judaism and displays a "chronic *need*" for the impossible (*italics mine*). It experiences a psychic crisis in which it retains what it casts off. Shakespeare, along with the culture to which he belongs, is caught in a painful double bind.

Milton understands difference differently; he shows how much is to be gained from a language of soft differences—from non-imperative acts of separation that are also guiltless avowals of proximity. My subtitle, "Undialectical Milton," echoes a recent essay by Pheng Cheah, "Non-Dialectical Materialism," which theorizes an alternative to Marxist dialectics through readings of Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze. My sense of the "undialectical" is less philosophically delimited than Cheah's: I refer to the logic of the *agon* in general—to conflictual modes of discourse in the broadest sense. I argue that Milton, in spite of his status as a great polemicist, develops a discursive pacifism that exposes the limitations of contestatory habits of thought. Milton neither refrains from making conceptual distinctions nor from suggesting that distinct concepts reciprocally influence each other (one of the common valences of the dialectic in academic discourse), but such interactions tend to suggest complementarity, resemblance, and mere proximity. Conflict is not the motor of Milton's verse.

Cheah's essay succinctly demonstrates the omnipresence even of a specifically *materialist* dialectic in modern intellectual history by showing how it connects Marx and Engels to revisions of Marxism by the Frankfurt School and to recent scholarly discourses on performativity, secular reason, and Foucauldian micro-politics. The Adelman example shows that one need not be an avowed materialist to inherit a tradition of thinking in which antagonism sets thinking in motion. Interestingly, the most important precedent for the pervasiveness of the constitutive exclusion in recent scholarship is one of the two parties Cheah names "non-dialectical." Derrida rightfully earns this description in the specific sense that he disputes the logic whereby "matter" is understood as an "outside" to subjectivity—"that external thing that stands against the subject" (73-4).¹¹⁷ One might generalize by saying that the logic of contamination one finds throughout Derrida's work—in which presence is granted by otherness and is thus deformed from the inside as it is constituted—is a refusal of dialectics. I want to point out, however, that my accurate if cursory summary of Derridean deconstruction closely resembles the logic of the constitutive exclusion. In Derrida, competing imperatives clash, and binary oppositions are retained and intensified in order to generate spectacular collisions.

The following lines from *Rogues* (2005), which Cheah quotes, clarify the location of the *agon* in Derrida:

¹¹⁷ My impression is that the poststructuralist rhetoric of the humanities is mainly a consequence of deconstruction, which is why I focus here on Derrida rather than Deleuze. It is an interesting fact that even those scholarly discourses that claim no interest in deconstruction often employ the vocabulary I explore in these pages—an undoubtedly Derridean legacy.

[The im-possible] announces itself; it precedes me, swoops down upon and seizes me here and now in a nonvirtualizable way, in actuality and not in potentiality. It comes upon me from on high, in the form of an injunction that does not simply wait on the horizon, that I do not see coming, that never leaves me in peace and never lets me put it off until later. Such an urgency cannot be *idealized* any more than the other as other can. The im-possible is thus not a (regulative) idea or ideal. It is what is most undeniably real. And sensible. Like the other. Like the irreducible and inappropriable difference of the other. (84)

In these lines, Derrida offers an alternative to the metaphysics of action whereby a self-possessed subject takes action in a world understood as available to him—proximate, present, and subject to human intervention. Instead, the presence of the subject and its ability to take action are given in the first place by an absolute otherness; the presence and power of the human subject are constituted by exteriority, which disrupts what it forms. Cheah's useful phrase for the situation in which the subject finds itself is "structural openness" to otherness (80). Hence the language of the "im-possible," which refers to a fundamentally *non-present* presence that is nonetheless "actual."

In this way, Derrida dispenses with oppositions between subject and object, presence and absence, and so on—oppositions that have structured the history of philosophy extending back as far as Plato, whom Derrida on one famous occasion assessed through the paradigmatically dialectical figure of the *pharmakon*.¹¹⁸ I want to suggest, however, that the logic of opposition has found a new home in Derrida's performance of affect and in his rhetoric of necessity. The "im-possible" is "actual," it is "real," and it is "sensible." It is "undeniable" and "irreducible." It takes the grammatical form of the imperative—of an "injunction" that "never leaves me in peace and never lets me put it off." To use an early modern vocabulary, one might say it "harrows" the subject, plaguing her with a sense of "urgency" and a responsibility that can never be satisfied. Such is the movement of Derridean thought: it insists on the absence of presence and the actuality of the impossible, creating an affective and intellectual tension that explodes the concepts about which philosophers have too often been complacent.

My point here is that the illuminating violence of deconstruction is also its limitation. Echoing Derrida's critique of the "metaphysics of presence," one might describe deconstruction as an unwitting "metaphysics of tension"—a movement of antinomies the insights of which can only be the sparks of perpetual friction. As rigorous a thinker as Derrida deserves more than these few paragraphs of critique, but my aim here is modest. Perhaps I have said enough to show how our prevailing modes of analysis remain obstinately conflictual, even when (perhaps especially when) they depart from philosophical tradition. My hope is that readers recognize the language of the humanities in my account of the logic of the constitutive exclusion, a feature of both Derridean deconstruction and a wide field of scholarly inquiry that tends to quote him without knowing it. Reading *Paradise Regain'd* with the Book of Job opens a new perspective on Milton's poetics, but it also supplies our own intellectual environment with a mode of thought of which we are sorely deprived: one that is serenely inquisitive, receptive to differences that are less than absolute, and, with its strange and beguiling freedom from tension, thoroughly undialectical.

¹¹⁸ See Derrida ("Dissemination").

I. Friendly Foils: The Stoic and the Jew

Experimentalist accounts of casual indifference draw Stoics and Jews into relationships of suspended proximity. These figures resemble the experimentalist without being identical to him or to each other, and all three positions are distinct without being framed as hostile to each other.¹¹⁹ In this section, I show how experimentalists refrain from exaggerated gestures of identification or repudiation. Like Baptist Goodall, I speak of the Stoic and the Jew in the same breath, but of course these figures are asymmetrical. The figure of the Stoic calls to mind a philosophical doctrine that is very much alive in seventeenth-century England, while the figure of the Jew conjures up the specter of an expulsion and a shadowy otherness that remains part of Christian self-understanding. Experimentalists are intellectually engaged with Stoic philosophy; their encounter with Judaism is contingent on caricature. I begin with experimentalist commentary on Stoic indifference, turn to the more enigmatic figure of the Jew, and close this section by considering the way these figures interact.

On first glance, experimental observation seems to require an obstinate attention to objects of inquiry; Baconianism is notable for its aversion to those flights of fancy it attributes to the scholastics.¹²⁰ The foregoing chapters have shown, however, that experimentalists are eager to imagine states of feeling in which passion is minimal without having to be suppressed; casual indifference is no less an experience of freedom from discipline and rigor than it is from intensity of feeling. To use a Miltonic term, rigorously enforced indifference threatens to “enure” the self to sensory stimuli; receptivity depends on a careless awareness of whatever comes to pass (4.139). My emphasis on waywardness in the foregoing chapters draws attention to the unmethodical dimension of such a discourse, which runs counter to those familiar narratives in which Baconianism inaugurates modern science by rigorously imposing a method on natural philosophy. When Boyle, modifying an image from Seneca, pictures himself gathering thoughts with the “Innocency and Pleasure” of a honeybee winding its way from one flower to the next, he imagines a freedom from discipline—including the constraints of method and logical procedure.

Interestingly, even as the threat of sensory inurement through self-discipline comes to be labeled “Stoic,” self-described Stoics distinguish themselves from exactly the same sort of foolish rigidity. Justus Lipsius, the historical figure most closely associated with Renaissance Neo-Stoicism, is scrupulous in his rejection of “obstinacy.” In *De Constantia* (1584), he writes:

‘Constancy’ is a right and immovable strength of mind, neither lifted up nor pressed down with external or casual accidents. By ‘strength’ I understand a steadfastness not from Opinion, but from judgment and sound Reason. For I would in any case exclude obstinacy (or as I may more correctly term it, pertinacity), which is a certain hardness of stubborn mind, proceeding from pride or vainglory....But the true mother of Constancy is Patience, and lowliness of mind, which is a voluntary sufferance without grudging of all things whatsoever can happen to or in a man. This being regulated by the rule of right Reason is the

¹¹⁹ These figures are almost always gendered male; hence the masculine pronoun.

¹²⁰ If experimentalism sometimes itself relies on the logic of the constitutive exclusion, it is surely with respect to the endlessly caricatured “schoolmen.”

very root whereupon is settled the high and mighty body of that fair oak
Constancy. (37)

For the Stoic, the problem with obstinacy is not the insistence with which a position is held, but the psychological source of that insistence. “Constancy” and “obstinacy” are equally “strong”; the difference lies in the wielder of strength: while “sound Reason” clamps down in the interest of constancy, mere “pride” seizes control in the “obstinate” or “pertinacious” mind. For the experimentalist, of course, no such etiology defines obstinacy; it is the masculine rigidity of the Stoic’s intellectual posture that obviates insight. Lipsius is far from such a theory. The “rule” of “Reason” triumphantly “regulate[s]” Stoic constancy, the “high and mighty body” of the “oak” of which it is the metaphorical “root” a sure sign of masculine imperiousness.

Another illuminating point of contrast is Lipsius’s citation of the famous opening lines of Book II of *De Rerum Natura*, in which Lucretius describes the pleasure associated with witnessing the suffering of others. In Chapter 1, I show that Bacon and Montaigne both offer the same unusual interpretation of this passage. They do not understand it simply as a description of the pleasure of being spared another’s pain. Instead, they contemplate the highly specific pleasure of effortlessness in the face of another’s anxious struggle for survival. Compare Lipsius’s version:

And as some apples are bitter in the belly yet relishing sweet in taste, so are other men’s miseries, we ourselves being free from them. Suppose a man be on the shore beholding a shipwreck, it will move him somewhat, yet truly not without an inward tickling of his mind, because he sees other men’s danger, himself being in serenity. (46)

Here, the Lucretian shipwreck is an occasion to note a simple contrast between “danger” and the “serenity” of safety; Lipsius’s language is worlds away from the distinctive freedom from labor that defines experimentalist affect. His metaphorical supplement to the Lucretian image rests on a rather basic opposition between “miseries” and their absence, confirming his interest in an easy distinction between pleasure and pain.

More interesting than Lipsius’s interpretation of Lucretius (and the difference it establishes between neo-Stoic and experimentalist affect) is the status of these lines as an oblique parody of Horatian figures of literary pleasure. Throughout the last three chapters, but especially in Chapter 2, I explore the connection between experimentalist affect and the pleasures of poetry: Sidney’s “medicine of cherries” becomes a “syrup of violets” in Boyle’s *Occasional Reflections*—a figure for the marriage of delight and instruction. Boyle radicalizes the conception of the literary implied by this metaphor by granting it a universal application. He suggests that *all* seemingly frivolous activities might contain precious medicine, including his own practice of wayward “reflection.” Lipsius, on the other hand, surpasses the mere delimitation of the metaphor to the realm of the properly literary; he undermines the metaphor itself. Lipsius’s “sweet” “apple” does not mask a bitter but edifying moral precept; its contents consist of mere “bitter[ness],” which, more than simply proving useless, serves a counter-therapeutic function. “Bitter in the belly,” it upsets the stomach.

While experimentalism courts the literary, Stoicism is eager to keep its distance.¹²¹ Langius, the edifying interlocutor in the dialogue that comprises most of *De Constantia*, offers the following explanation of his rhetoric:

I perceive then...you expect wafer cakes or sweet wine at my hands; but ever while you desired either fire or razor, therein you did well. For I am a philosopher, Lipsius, not a fiddler: my purpose is to teach, not to entice you; to profit, not to please you; to make you blush, rather than smile; and to make you penitent, not insolent. 'The school of a philosopher is a physician's shop,' so said Rufus once, where we must repair for health, not for pleasure. That physician dallies not, neither flatters, but pierces, pricks, razes, and with the savoury salt of good talk sucks out the filthy corruption of the mind. Wherefore do not look to me for roses, oils, or pepper, but for thorns, lancing tools, wormwood, and sharp vinegar." (47)

Though Lipsius's text seems to share the traditional literary project of conveying moral precepts, he rejects the impulse to sweeten bitter truths with rhetorical art. Instead, he bullies the reader into gritting her teeth and enduring the pain of "pierc[ing]," "prick[ing]," and "raz[ing]," along with whatever menacing ministrations require "lancing tools, wormwood, and sharp vinegar." Lipsius, in the person of Langius, displays an exaggerated severity that requires the reader either to turn away from the text or to adopt the defensive posture of Stoic constancy. "Syrup of violets" is not among the concoctions in this "physician's shop."

A final, related point of contrast: In *De Constantia*, "wandering" is a key metaphor for inconstancy. For experimentalists, however, "wandering" tends to signal a desirable experience of careless attention. Recall, for instance, the "expatiation" of Boyle's mind in the experience of meditation, or Marvell's wayward exploration of worlds natural and supernatural on the grounds of Nun Appleton. Lipsius sees no such ethical or epistemological advantages in waywardness. Framed by a flight from the violence of warfare, *De Constantia* insists that even such purposeful movement offers only illusory comfort: "And what madness is this in you, to seek remedy of this inward wound by motion and trudging from place to place?" (34). The meandering movements of the restless are distinctly unsympathetic:

As they that be held with a fever do toss and turn themselves unquietly, and often change their beds through a vain hope of remedy, in like case are we, who being sick in our minds do without any fruit wander from one country to another. This is indeed to display our grief, but not to allay it. To discover this inward flame, but not to quench it, very fitly said that wise Roman: 'it is proper to a sick person not to suffer anything long, but to use mutations instead of medicines. From here proceed wandering travels, and walks on sundry shores. And our inconstancy, always loathing things present, one whiles will be upon the sea, the incontinent desires the land.'" (33)

¹²¹ As in Plato, the presentation of an anti-literary argument by way of a quasi-dramatic dialogue is an irony that should not be neglected. For my purposes here, suffice it to say that Lipsius suggests an affinity between Stoicism and a contempt for literary frivolity, even if the form of *De Constantia* does not bear out this suggestion.

Quoting Seneca, Lipsius advocates standing firm: “wander[ing]” is a “vain” escape from trouble, a fruitless substitute for a proper “medicine.” While experimentalist wandering intensifies receptivity, here it expresses a “loathing of things present”; a symptom of inconstancy, it signals impatience with one’s predicament—a misguided attempt to rid oneself of the matter at hand.

The philosophical incompatibility of neo-Stoicism and experimentalism should by now be clear, but the thrill of reading experimentalist engagements with Stoicism is to discover how little appeal an adversarial relation actually has. Instead, experimentalists ponder, criticize, question, and sometimes even praise Stoic indifference, establishing intimacy without affiliation. They make a point of making contact—but refrain from simple gestures of repudiation or empathy.

In *Scep̄sis scientifica* (1665), Joseph Glanvill fashions the sort of affective identity my accounts of Montaigne, Bacon, Boyle, and Marvell have by now made familiar: he presents himself as “indifferent” and temperamentally “lazy,” but without those states precluding energetic disagreement or intense intellectual exertion (1). Indeed, the “laziness of [his] humour” is perfectly compatible with a rigorous work ethic: “One of my chief designs,” he explains, “was, to remove that sloath and laziness which in these later ages hath cramp’t endeavor...” (3). Stoicism enters the discussion in the form of a determinism Glanvill disputes: obstinate perseverance incarnated as physical law. Glanvill writes:

‘Tis clear from experience, that, though many of our *volitions* are *motions* from the *Passion*, yet some of our *Determinations* are from *Understanding* and *immaterial* Faculties. And sometimes we set our *Wills* to determine in things that are purely *indifferent*, to make trial of our *Liberty*; when we find not the least provocation or incitement to the action from any *emotion* of the *body*. And indeed to suppose every action of the Will to depend upon a previous *Appetite* or *Passion*, is to destroy our *Liberty*, and to infer a *Stoical Fatality* with all the dangerous consequences of that Doctrine. (29)

Stoicism often implies a determinist cosmos, and Glanvill’s remark is a defense of human freedom in the face of such “fatality.” Of more interest than the metaphysical claim is its emotional atmosphere: though he disputes the “Doctrine” of Stoicism, to name the philosophy is to utter a synonym for indifference, and Glanvill favors a *different* indifference. The “liberty” of the “will” is contingent on its “indifferen[ce]”—on the “indifferen[ce]” of the “things” on which it is “set”—and such freedom is described as a detachment from “motion” and “passion.” (Interestingly, Glanvill describes the “will’s” free exploration of an “indifferent” object as a “trial,” a term that calls to mind both the natural philosopher’s labor and the experiences that most concern me below: biblical Job’s ordeal of suffering and the verbal “duel” of Jesus and Satan in *Paradise Regain’d*.) Glanvill’s experimentalist carelessness takes shape in the shadow of Stoic rigor; the former frees itself from causality while the latter submits to it. On the other hand, Glanvill only carves out a space for such freedom in a world largely governed, as the Stoics suggest, by mechanical causality: “though *many* of our volitions are motions from the Passion, yet *some* of our Determinations are from Understanding and immaterial Faculties” (italics mine). The Stoics are right, just not all the time—and perhaps the same holds for the form of indifference they encourage?

John Wilkins writes favorably of Stoic indifference in *A discourse concerning the beauty of providence* (1649), but his picture of that indifference is considerably softer than what one finds, say, in the Lipsian language of “immovable strength.” Citing the Stoic Epictetus, he characterizes “indifferency” as exactly the sort of wayward roaming Lipsius rejects:

All things that befall us shal lead us on to the same journeys end, Happines. And therefore we should not in our expectation of future matters ingage our selves in the desire of any particular successe. But with a *travailers* indifferency (as *Epictetus* speaks in *Arian*) who when he comes to doubtfull turnings, doth not desire one way should be true more than another. So we should entertain every thing that we meet with in our passage through this life (106-7).

For Wilkins, “indifferency” is the mode and the mood of wayward exploration: the passage’s emphasis does not fall on security, as it does in *De Constantia*, but on the capacity to “entertain every thing.” Wilkins is interested in the open-ended contemplation of whatever crosses one’s path. On the other hand, he speaks elsewhere of “an indifferent composure of minde, which resolves to be content in every condition” (111). Such observations, combined with his citation of Epictetus, suggest a more thoroughgoing Stoicism in which indifference is generated by discipline—in which it names an affective state one “resolves” to inhabit. “Travailers indifferency” can be read as a pun that compresses Stoic and experimentalist forms of dispassion: it indicates the wandering of the casually indifferent observer as well as the “travail” with which Stoic indifference is distinguished from experimentalist nonchalance.

Unlike Stoicism, with which experimentalists sustain vigorous intellectual engagement, ignorance of Judaism reduces it to a figure of mere refusal: the Jew is often quite simply the unconverted. Yet the flatness of the figure makes it all the more remarkable in this context. Experimentalists approach what looks like a sign of mere otherness with an inquisitive interest that grants it an unexpected multidimensionality. Recall Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress”:

And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews. (9-10)

Marvell tosses off his remark as if it were shorthand for a suspended future: the obstinate Jews will never convert. “Till the conversion of the Jews” means “when hell freezes over.” But Marvell, as I explain in detail in the previous chapter, upsets expectations. The softening of Jewish obstinacy is real: the poem itself enacts the apocalypse that should be permanently relegated to the future (along with Jewish “conversion”), and casual indifference—the reinvention of “Jewish” hard-heartedness as gentle insouciance—is the medium of apocalypse. In a poem that introduces its key terms as if they were offhanded turns of phrase, “the Jews” exemplify the power of a seemingly casual expression to illuminate the poet’s purposes. And since non-conversion is the poem’s first metaphor of steadfastness (I take the beloved’s frustrating “coyness” not as a metaphor but as the “literal” subject of the poem), it is not simply a foil but a point of departure for a meditation on indifference. The poem renders Jewish obstinacy supple by performing nonchalance.

Above, I mention Thomas Browne’s conversion of Jewish vice into Christian virtue, “obstinacy” into “constancy”; the gesture is better understood in the context of *Religio Medici*’s (1643) affective self-portrait. Browne famously wishes that “we might procreate like trees,

without conjunction, or that there were any way to perpetuate the world without this triviall and vulgar way of coition..." (83). The remark is typical of Browne, who is averse even to traces of violence; interpersonal "conjunction" is too intense for him. Yet the pacific aura he cultivates is of special relevance to my discussion; it enables the apprehension of soft differences. Indeed, even the most dramatically dialectical confrontations seem nonviolent within the gentle halo of Browne's serenity. "I am one methinks," he writes, "but as the world; wherein notwithstanding there are a swarme of distinct essences, and in them another world of contrarieties.... Let mee be nothing if within the compasse of my selfe, I doe not find the battle of *Lepanto*" (80). Even the great sea battle between the Holy League and the Ottoman Empire (one in which one party was in fact definitively trounced by the other) is reduced to an unproblematic psychological "contrariety" within the "compasse" of the casually indifferent "selfe." Browne asks the reader to develop a similar capacity to entertain thoughts without violence, making the experience of reading the book an exercise in psychological peace. He writes that his ruminations contain "many things to be taken in a soft and flexible sense, and not to be called to the rigid test of reason," emphasizing the extent to which soft differences are generated affectively; they derive from the attitude with which, to borrow a phrase from Wilkins, one "entertain[s] every thing" (10).

Jews have a privileged place in Browne's buffered world. After explaining that "religion" is an "honourable stile" for which one can sustain one's "zeal" without vehement passion, Boyle illustrates the amplitude of his gentle dispassion by extending toleration even to Jews: "Neither doth herein my zeal so farre make me forget the general charitie I owe unto humanity, as rather to hate then pity Turkes, Infidels and (what is worse) Jewes..." (11). Jews are marked as an extreme case of otherness, surpassing even those "Turkes" who face off with Christendom in the psychologized "battle of Lepanto." In the passage leading up to the transformation of vice into virtue, Browne again singles out Jews as uniquely depraved. Notice how Browne shares the vocabulary of "Doctrine" with which Glanvill figured the fixity of Stoic philosophy:

I cannot but wonder with what exceptions the *Samaritanes* could confine their beliefe to the *Pentateuch*, or five books of *Moses*. I am amazed at the Rabbinicall Interpretations of the Jews, upon the Old Testament, as much as their defection from the New: and truly it is beyond wonder, how that contemptible and degenerate issue of *Jacob*, once so devoted to Ethnick Superstition, and so easily seduced to the Idolatry of their Neighbours, should now in such an obstinate and peremptory beliefe adhere unto their own Doctrine, expect impossibilities, and in the face and eye of the Church persist without the least hope of conversion. (36)

Jews are "contemptible" and "degenerate," and yet Browne's commentary shades into admiration when he describes them as "beyond wonder": their "obstina[cy]" is an improvement on their history of "eas[y]...seduc[tion]." It may be the case that they are "obstinate and peremptory," but these qualities convey Judaism's triumph over "the Idolatry of their Neighbours," of which they were once, according to the Hebrew Bible, guilty themselves. Furthermore, Browne's reference to "Samaritanes" creates another opportunity to soften the edge of difference. It is a near non sequitur, but it serves the purpose of introducing *another other*: biblical foes of the Jews whom Browne basically treats as Jews, since both are unchristian. Rhetorically, then, Jews are weirdly reconciled to Samaritanes, just as, soon after, Christian disdain for Judaism loses its sting as the latter becomes an admirable example of devotion.

The subtle transvaluation of obstinacy is rendered explicit when Browne renames it “constancy” in the lines I quote above. Soon after, he suggests that Jewish stubbornness is a consequence of Christianity’s failure to exhibit the gentleness on display in *Religio Medici*. In other words, stark oppositions are generated by affect; they do not derive from the properties of the terms under comparison. “The Jew is obstinate in all his fortunes; the persecution of fifteen hundred yeares hath but confirmed them in their error: they have already endured whatsoever may be inflicted, and have suffered, in a bad cause, even to the commendation of their enemies” (36). This final phrase gives an impersonal description of a gesture Browne might claim as his own, since he has implicitly “commend[ed]” Judaism while casting aspersions upon it. Moreover, the slide of the single figure of the “Jew” to the plural “them” in that sentence transforms a bogey into a population, trading caricature for sociology. “Persecution,” Brown continues, “is a bad and indirect way to plant Religion; It hath beene the unhappy method of angry devotions, not onely to confirme honest Religion, but wicked Heresies, and extravagant opinions” (36). One might call this remark a critique of dialectic: violence transforms mere difference into a settled opposition; it encourages polarization. The curious consequence of Browne’s anti-Semitism, then, is that it encourages Christianity to emulate Jewish obstinacy and abandon its habit of persecuting Jews.

Robert Boyle is more emphatic and explicit about his interest in the Jewish prehistory of Christianity. In the “Introductory Preface” to his *Occasional Reflections* (1665), he justifies the “variations” of his biblical citations from the “English Version” by recalling his training in Hebrew:

For having had the Curiosity to get my self instructed, as well by Jews as Christians, in the Eastern Tongues (especially the Hebrew) I thought I need not strictly confirme my self to the words of our Translators, when ever I could render the meaning of a Text in such tearms as seemed proper or expressive; or without injuring the sence of the Hebrew or the Greek, could better accommodate my present purpose. (1)

Boyle bypasses the English bible in favor the wisdom of his Jewish instructors. He is careful to protect scriptural Greek and Hebrew, but “especially the Hebrew,” from the “injur[y]” of translation. Boyle describes erroneous fidelity to the English bible as a fault of “stict[ness],” while “Eastern Tongues” are implicitly framed as freedom from that constraint, and the practice of translation (on the basis of the instruction of Jewish teachers) is an experience of flexibility—the “accommodat[ion]” of “present purpose.” For a moment, then, avatars of fixity present opportunities for freedom.

In a passage I cite in Chapter 2, Boyle’s commentary on the problem of hard-heartedness brings together the various threads of my discussion, treating both Stoics and Jews as Others who turn out to be less than Other. Partway through an account of a fishing expedition, Boyle, sounding like Baptist Goodall, but with the characteristically flamboyant anthropomorphism of the *Reflections*, remarks to his interlocutor and fellow angler Lindamor that though the river might seem “wantonly to fly,” its wild vigor should be understood as a virtue: it “imparts Fertility and Plenty,” and it “helps to bring us Home” from “the Remoter parts of the World, and the Indies themselves, either East or West” (50-51). Lindamor’s response incorporates figures of Stoicism and Judaism in order to describe undisciplined indifference:

Me-thinks... That amongst other *good things*, wherewith this River furnish us, it may supply us with a good Argument against those Modern Stoicks, who are wont, with more Eloquence than Reason, to Declaim against the Passions, and would fain perswade *Others*, (for I doubt *whether* they be so perswaded themselves) That the Mind ought to deal with its Affections, as *Pharaoh* would have dealt with the *Jews-Males*, whom he thought it *wise to Destroy*, lest they might, one Day, grow up into a condition to Revolt from him. But, because the Passions are (sometimes) Mutinous, to wish an Apathy, is as unkind to us, as it would be to our Country, To wish we had no Rivers, because (sometimes) they do Mischief, when great or suddain Rain swells them above *their Banks*. (51)

Notwithstanding Boyle's reference to a specifically contemporary Judaism in his observations about translating the bible, Lindamor's remarks exemplify a typical asymmetry between Stoicism and Judaism: while "Stoicks" are present-day philosophical adversaries, "Jews" are characters located in the biblical past. Since, however, that past is biblical, and thus belongs to Christianity's own prehistory, "Jews" present an opportunity for sympathy: they are victims of paranoia who need protection. Metaphorically, they stand for "Affections" it might be tempting to preemptively destroy. To follow the logic of this metaphor into a future it does not make explicit, the advantage of refraining from such an act (as the Bible has it, by failing to accomplish one's genocidal mission) is the eventual Jewish exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Moses (who survives Pharaoh's infanticide). The great narrative of Jewish liberation is an encrypted figure for the liberation of the passions in the experience of casual indifference. Boyle underscores this suggestion by implicitly identifying "Pharaoh," whose "heart," one recalls, God repeatedly "hardens," with Lindamor's "Modern Stoick," who "Declaim[s] against the Passions."

Another angler, Eusebius, carries the conversation forward, drawing a contrast between Christian soft-heartedness and Jewish obstinacy, but then looking back to the example of Abraham, Judaism's patriarch, as a figure of equanimity:

When I consider... *That* of the Immaculate and Divine *Lamb* himself, 'tis recorded in the Gospel, That *He Look'd round about, upon certain Jews, with Indignation, being griev'd for the Hardness of their Hearts*; So that two Passions are ascrib'd to *Christ himself* in one Verse: And when I consider too, the Indifferency, (and consequently the Innocence) of Passions *in their own Nature*, and the Use that Wise and Virtuous Persons may make of them, I cannot think we ought to throw away (or so much as wish away) those Instruments of Piety, which God and Nature has put into our Hands: But am very *well content* we should retain them, upon such conditions as *Abraham* did, *Those Domesticks he bought with his Money*, whom the Scripture tells us, *He both Circumcis'd, and kept as Servants*. (51-52)

In Eusebius's account, Christ's affective intensity is thoroughgoing: he is not beatific, or, if he is, his beatitude encompasses "grief" and "Indignation." The "Hardness" of "certain Jew[ish]" "Hearts" elicits those vehement passions. The location of this "Hardness" in the "Hearts" of only "certain Jews" is significant: it suggests a wide range of Jewish dispositions—including those of Christ and his followers. When Eusebius figures a "Virtuous Person[']s" relationship with his

own emotions as Abraham's relationship with his servants, he is identifying with Christianity's Jewish prehistory and implicitly drawing a contrast between Jewish *softness* of heart and *Egyptian* obstinacy. Since the metaphor comes a few lines after the allusion to the exodus from Egypt, it cannot help but call to mind Pharaoh's slaves as a point of contrast with Abraham's "Domesticks." While Pharaoh is a hard-hearted tyrant, Abraham is a gentle master. The "Domesticks" are "both Circumcis'd, and kept as Servants," incorporated into the Hebrew community they serve rather than brutally subjected to its might. The figure is a compromise with Stoicism: if the passions are like Abraham's servants, they are neither annihilated nor enchained, but neither are they simply free. In this way, the Stoic rhetoric of self-discipline seems to have left its mark.

Like Glanvill, Wilkins, Marvell, and Browne, Boyle stages encounters with Stoics and Jews that are best understood as mere occasions for contact. Sometimes admiring, sometimes averse, but never simply scornful or adulatory—experimentalists engage with avatars of indifference by choosing ambiguous proximity over clear affinity or estrangement. Milton's engagement with the Job story, to which I now turn my attention, follows this pattern; in *Paradise Regain'd*, Milton draws from the Book of Job in order to develop a searching poetics of non-opposition.

II. Cursing the Day: Job's Dialectic

A long succession of scholars has shed light on *Paradise Regain'd* by exploring its debt to the Book of Job. The next two sections of this chapter offer a detailed interpretation of Milton's poem, presenting a new account of its relationship with the biblical narrative. First, though, I prepare for that discussion by showing that the Book of Job sets the terms for Milton's version of the temptation of Christ. My claim is that the biblical narrative is much more than a precedent: virtually everything I say about the Book of Job holds true for Milton's poem, with one crucial exception. The Book of Job displays a poetics of soft differences: seeming antagonisms are actually alliances, and adversaries collude. This is *not* to say that actual oppositions turn out to remain in reciprocal antagonistic relationships of mutual transformation (as a familiar dialectical hermeneutic would have it), but that these oppositions are in fact only apparent. The one exception to this undialectical pattern is Job's affect: his rage against God drives the poem forward. One might say the poem distills dialectical energy by reducing it to affect: Job's anger in the face of injustice. What matters for Milton is that such conflictual affect illuminates creation. There is a long tradition of reading the Book of Job as a natural philosophical poem: my supplementary claim is that the poem's extraordinary, super-human vision of creation is generated by emotional tension.¹²² Milton makes the Job poet's link between affect and epistemology, but he exchanges violence for peace: Milton's casual indifference takes the place of Job's rage, and *Paradise Regain'd* is an extended illustration of the power of carelessness rather than righteous indignation to intensify receptivity.

¹²² As Alter, speaking of Job 38-41, puts it, "the natural world is valuable for itself, and man, far from standing at its center, is present only by implication, peripherally and impotently, in this welter of fathomless forces and untamable beasts" (104). In his *Pattern of Patience*, for instance, J.F. Senault observes that Job "treats like a curious Naturalist, and discovers the most hidden Beauties of Nature..." (*preface*, quoted by Lewalski 26).

The contents of the Book of Job are the best evidence for the conceptual resources it offers Milton, but the mere figure of Job also invokes a rhetoric of soft differences. Job both is and is not a Stoic, just as he both is and is not a Jew: no other figure in scripture, literary history, or the popular imagination so clearly calls those figures to mind. He does so by establishing the sorts of relationships those figures encourage, but with respect to those figures themselves: he resembles them, in other words, without simply embodying them.

Francisco de Quevedo's *Doctrina Estoica* (1635) argues that the historical Job is actually a Stoic—that Stoicism need not be reconciled with Christianity because it already appears in scripture in the person of Job. This interpretation is less than canonical, but it is the logical extension of a tradition that celebrates the masculine strength of Jobean perseverance. Barbara Lewalski points out that Job is often figured as a “wrestler or fighter in an athletic contest,” and sometimes as a “warrior on the battlefield” whose story thus deserves a “heroic exegesis” (22, 24). Milton's *On Christian Doctrine* (1650s?) brings out a different dimension of the Job story, drawing a contrast between “Stoic” “apathy” and the violence of “patient” Job's emotions: “Sensibility to pain, and complaints and lamentations, are not inconsistent with true patience, as may be seen from the example of Job and of other holy men in adversity” (740). Job is linked to Stoicism in Milton's imagination, but he stands as proof that the sort of masculine discipline associated with Stoic *apatheia* is too narrow a model for “true patience,” a capacious virtue that makes room for the righteous cries of the oppressed.

Job's relationship with Judaism is similar: a clear association, but one that falls short of identification. As Victoria Kahn points out, “according to patristic and seventeenth-century commentators, Job was not a Jew but instead a gentile, who lived before the dissemination of the Law” (638). Yet Job's ethnic and religious identity is ambiguous. Lewalski explains that “Jewish tradition” and “some Christian commentators” “identified him as Hebrew,” while “the dominant Christian tradition asserted...that Job was a gentile” (12). The question of Job's “historical” identity (as Hebrew or gentile, pre-Mosaic or post-) does not exhaust the issue: the question of Job's place in scripture is complex. Kahn suggests that he carries connotations of legalism (which would tend to be coded “Jewish” in seventeenth-century culture): “In Milton's Christ (as perhaps ultimately in the book of Job itself), Job's legalistic understanding of justice gives way to what we might call dialogue or conversation” (639). Lewalski points out that Origen “finds in Job all the merits of all the other Old Testament heroes”—a position that comes to be part of “the dominant tradition” (25). In this way, he is an apotheosis of the values of the Hebrew Bible. Perhaps this is the most important point about Job's Jewishness: though theologians tend to designate him a gentile, he belongs to Jewish scripture and illustrates its values.

The text of the Book of Job deepens its relevance to the rhetoric of soft differences: it establishes disarming alliances everywhere it seems to require an adversarial logic. None of the poem's seeming conflicts—between God and Satan, between God and Job, between Satan and Job, between Job and his comforters—are actual conflicts, though they sometimes seem to be. Satan's relationship with God is the only one of these unexpected alliances that is relatively well-known—but even this moment has not been read in sufficiently undialectical terms.¹²³ Satan approaches God as one of his children: “Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them” (1:6; repeated at 2:1). Satan, an undefined “adversary,” arrives “among” the “sons of God,” without the poem

¹²³ Alter says simply that “it was the Adversary who was the prominent and sinister member of ‘the sons of God’” (99).

distinguishing Satan from the others in any more pronounced way than by granting him a name. Even this special title only names Satan's role in the coming contest with God; he seems best understood as another of God's progeny. Indeed, most seventeenth-century theologies would confirm that suggestion, genealogically speaking, since Satan is a wayward angel, but even the text of the poem itself, which long predates that backstory, emphasizes the place of the ambiguous adversary "among" the other "sons."

The poem further blurs the distinction between divine and satanic agencies by making them jointly responsible for Job's suffering. Sometimes, God's words suggest Satan is ultimately to blame for Job's trial: "And still [Job] holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause" (2:3). Yet it is God who first mentions Job to Satan, issuing a challenge by holding him up as an example of righteousness: "Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?" (1:8). One need not descend to details to notice the ambiguous agency of the phrase with which God agrees with Satan to make Job suffer: "Behold, he in thine hand; but save his life" (2:6). Somewhere in the vague conceptual space between the execution of an act through delegation and the grudging granting of permission, God places Job in Satan's hands. By setting the least restrictive of boundaries to Satan's violence—he might do anything he wishes to Job aside from taking "his life"—God implicitly proposes that Satan reduce Job to a level of extreme abjection. God and Satan are agreed on this: such is the nondualism of the universe in which Job undergoes his trial.

If God and Satan cannot be meaningfully distinguished from each other on moral grounds, since Satan is God's "son," his interlocutor, and his agent, and if they seem jointly responsible for Job's suffering, then perhaps the poem narrates a conflict between Job and this doubled divine agency? Kahn writes persuasively of Job's ironic complaint in the face of God's injustice (and of Milton's appropriation of that rhetoric in *Paradise Regain'd*)—an issue to which I soon turn. For the moment, though, I set aside what I take as the poem's only exception to its undialectical rule—the distillation of conflict into the refined and ultimately non-conflictual form of affect—and focus instead on the pervasiveness of the poem's soft differences. Ultimately, there can be no conflict between Job and God; the point of the story is that Job never loses faith. He ignores his wife's advice to "curse God, and die," remaining steadfast in his loyalty in spite of his abuse in God's satanic hands (2:9). It is only for this reason that God eventually blesses Job, restores and increases his property, and supplies him (perhaps disconcertingly to modern readers) with a replacement family: "seven sons and three daughters" (42: 13).

The poem closes with the restitution of Job's losses and the castigation of Job's comforters, raising the possibility of another opposition—between exemplary Job and his errant interlocutors. God's admonition to the comforters permits such an interpretation: "My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath" (42: 7). My view is that "wrath" names an affective antagonism the narrative fails to bear out. The contrast God draws between Job's words and those of the "friends" is barely intelligible. Job's final speech conveys contrition for blasphemy, exactly the crime of which Job's comforters seem here to have been found guilty: "Therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not... I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (42: 3, 6). Perhaps this final gesture of repentance is what God has in mind when he asserts that only Job has "spoken of me the thing that is right"—the comforters have made no apologies—but Job only prostrates himself before God after the long reproachful

soliloquy of the Voice from the Whirlwind, an opportunity for self-“abhor[rence]” the comforters only receive in these concluding lines. Indeed, God is now in the midst of asking them to repent—the eventual performance of which will align them decisively with Job: “Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams...and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering” (42: 8).¹²⁴

The strongest challenge to a facile opposition between Job and his comforters is not the incoherence of God’s distinction, however: it is the figure of Elihu, who seems both to exemplify and transcend the error of the others. When he appears, the poem suggests that he alone holds special wisdom: “They were amazed, they answered no more: they left off speaking” (32: 15). At the end of the poem, he alone evades God’s rebuke: “So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went, and did according as the Lord commanded them” (42: 9). Yet Elihu’s discourse blurs the poem’s seemingly distinct voices together—voices that would have to remain dissimilar in order to separate the faithful from the faithless. Elihu repeats the misguided counsel of the others, even as he offers a visionary litany of God’s wonders that resembles the sublime poetry of the Voice from the Whirlwind; he blurs the line between foolish theodicy and divine judgment. Elihu repeats the truism to which most of the comforters’ counsel amounts: If you are suffering, you must have strayed from God. As Elihu puts it, “For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways” (34: 11). On the other hand, his rhetorical power, which celebrates the wonder of the natural world, approximates the Voice from the Whirlwind:

Hearken unto this, O Job: stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God. Dost thou know when God disposed them, and caused the light of his cloud to shine? Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him which is perfect in knowledge? How thy garments are warm, when he quieteth the earth by the south wind? Hast you with him spread out the sky, which is strong, and as a molten looking-glass? (37: 14-18)

Robert Alter notes the superhuman power of Elihu’s rhetoric, though with an unfounded value judgment: “Elihu’s cosmic poetry does not quite soar like that of the Voice from the Whirlwind...but it is considerably more than the rehearsal of formulas we saw in Eliphaz and Zophar” (92). The important point is that Elihu’s rhetoric crosses a conceptual boundary the poem’s interpreter might wish to preserve: through Elihu, the poem carries the reader seamlessly from the language of cliché into the rhetoric of cosmic wonder.

Job’s undialectical relationship with God is more interesting than the poem’s other evasions of conflict. Structurally, Job and God are profoundly joined: the narrative sets out to prove the former’s obedience to the latter. Yet Job’s affect contains the violent energy drained from every other dimension of the poem. Kahn writes of “the tensions between the frame story of the book of Job and its troubling central dialogue, in which Job refuses the arguments of his

¹²⁴ It is certainly possible to read in order to make sense of the contrast between Job and his comforters, but the poem’s emphasis falls on the arbitrariness and incoherence of God’s judgment, of which this final distinction is yet another example. Such is the implication of Job’s phrasing when he repents: he finally admits that he “understood not” what is ultimately beyond human understanding. His misunderstanding was not so different from that of the others. Being wrong (epistemologically) is not the same as doing wrong (ethically).

comforters and demands to speak with God,” setting the subversive energy of Job’s grievances against the authoritarian closure of the Voice from the Whirlwind (626). I too believe the juxtaposition of frame and complaint is key to Milton’s understanding of the Book of Job, but I see it as an instance of complementarity rather than tension. I view the Voice from the Whirlwind’s extended, extra-moral vision of the wonders of the natural world as a *response* to Job’s complaint: God delivers what Job demands. To speak of a “frame story” is perhaps to suggest that the beginning and the end of the poem enforce simplistic closure, but the Voice from the Whirlwind does far more than assert God’s authority: it sings a sublime song about the universe that answers Job’s intellectual hunger.

Affective intensity generates epistemological breadth: Job’s anger elicits from God a vision of creation that dramatically widens the poem’s horizon. Alter has written insightfully of this visionary power, but without sufficient attention to its place in the narrative:

The culminating poem that God speaks out of the storm soars beyond everything that has preceded it in the book, the poet having wrought a poetic idiom even richer and more awesome than the one he gave Job. Through this pushing of poetic expression toward its own upper limits, the concluding speech helps us see the panorama of creation, as perhaps we could do only through poetry, with the eyes of God. (87)

It astonishes me that no credit is given to Job himself for this astonishing “panorama.” Indeed, speaking of it as the “culminating poem” of the book implies that what has gone before has given rise to it, but this suggestion is never made explicit. Most of the book is consumed by Job’s rebellion against a world in which even the righteous suffer. The drive to challenge God’s justice generates a succession of images of creation. If “poetry” permits divine vision by endowing the reader with “the eyes of God,” thereby refusing God’s exclusive access to “panoram[ic]” vision, then one should follow Kahn in attending to the poem’s interest in the non-dogmatic, non-authoritative dimensions of poetic language—which are, in this case, responsible for the expansion of the poem’s perspective.

The Book of Job is organized around the poetics of vision. From God’s opening challenge to Satan (“*Behold*, all that he hath is in thy power”) through the poem’s account of Job’s calamity (“And, *behold*, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house”) and the closing paean to natural philosophical wonder (“*Behold* now behemoth”), the poem emphatically instructs the reader to “behold” the images it holds before her (1:12, 1:19, 140: 15); italics mine). A poetics of light and darkness pervades the poem, which is about enlightenment in the most literal sense. This is a power that does not belong exclusively to God. Alter writes, “God...is imagined above all as the absolute sovereign of light and darkness,” but God illuminates creation *in answer to* Job’s desire for expansive vision; his powers of illumination are not simply a theological premise (91). Job’s wish to widen the horizon of perception is an affective response to suffering: “What is light given to a man,” he asks, “whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?” (3:23). Though Job never “curses God,” as his wife suggests, he blasphemes in a way that draws attention to the relationship between suffering and limited vision: “Job opened his mouth, and cursed his day” (3:1). Job’s complaint is an objection against the epistemological and perceptual dimness of his predicament: the fact of his suffering “hedge[s] [him] in,” since he can offer no explanation for it. He “curse[s] the day” because it fails to shed sufficient light. Suffering yields epistemological frustration:

Job's complaint is less a demand for the end of his trial than it is for a vision of a cosmos in which such unjust misery makes sense.

God does as he is told. At the end of the poem, Job can truthfully say, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee," and this experience of sight consists mainly of gaining access to God's vision of creation through poetic eloquence (42:5). The visionary language of the Voice from the Whirlwind is too well-known to merit an extended treatment here: suffice it to say that I agree that it depicts "a world that defies comfortable moral categorizings"—that the otherness of the natural world reveals a cosmos that exceeds any narrowly human frame of reference (Alter 106). Leviathan and Behemoth are the best-known examples: "two amphibious beasts that are at once part of the natural world and beyond it" because, although "not a single detail is mythological... everything is rendered with hyperbolic intensity" (Alter 107). The Voice from the Whirlwind, in the vividness of its images and the sheer length of its discourse, draws Job and the reader into an extra-moral world that teems with life, answering (if only in a disturbing—perhaps terrifying—way) Job's demand for an account of injustice: God ontologizes amorality and revels in the irreducible particulars of creation.

But even before this climactic moment, Job's agitated intellectual demands themselves illuminate creation. They cast a light into the darkness; they render it visible and, to borrow a phrase from Milton, make it a "darkness visible" (*Paradise Lost* 1.63). The rhetoric of the unknowable accompanies the poetic materialization of God's creatures, as if the apprehension of cosmic mysteriousness were itself capable of bringing natural wonders into view. Job's reflections in the following lines are a case in point:

As for the earth, out of it cometh bread: and under it is turned up as it were fire. The stones of it are the place of sapphires: and it hath dust of gold. There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen: The lion's whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it. He putteth forth his hand upon the rock; he overturneth the mountains by the roots. He cutteth out rivers among the rocks; and his eye seeth every precious thing. He bindeth the floods from overflowing; and the thing that is hid bringeth he forth to light. But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? (28: 28)

These lines are about knowledge withheld from God's creatures, but Job's account of creaturely blindness welcomes the creaturely into the poem: the "fowl," the "vulture," the "lion" and its "whelps." Intellectual vigor widens the poem's scope. "Earth," "fire," "stones," "sapphires," "gold," "rivers," and "floods"—these lines are as geological as they are zoological. Flights of anxious imagination telescope out from the demand for theodicy: Job's complaint actually envisions the universe it seeks to understand. The epistemological breadth of the poem helps explain the compatibility of Job's defiance and his submission. His refusal to allow his vision to rest on any particular feature of the natural world as if it were an object of inherent value is a refusal of idolatry. "If I beheld the sun when it shined," Job says, "or the moon walking in brightness; And my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand: This also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above" (31: 26-28). Job's roving eye proves his faithfulness; it searches the world for answers, never resting easy.

This is the dialectical kernel of the Book of Job: a rage for understanding that generates a poetic language that tirelessly ranges over and interrogates God's creation. In its voraciousness

and its confusion, Job's righteous indignation is an undialectical gesture of profound respect for the hidden agency that animates the cosmos. Because that agency is manifest mainly in the proliferation of natural wonders, and because it is divided into complementary functions (between "The Lord" and "Satan," between Elihu's voice and the Voice from the Whirlwind), such respect need not be authoritarian. Job's affective dialectic encourages the apprehension of a superhuman world for which a good name might be "nature"—a place where justice is nowhere to be found. The poem's irony is to be found not only in Job's righteously wrathful interrogation of the universe, but also in the restoration of Job's happiness at the conclusion—an event the poem demonstrates we have no reason to expect.

III. Rereading *Paradise Regain'd*: Some Critical Appraisals

As much as scholars differ on the interpretation of *Paradise Regain'd*, they tend to agree that the poem celebrates "self-mastery." My claim is that Milton follows other experimentalists in exploring an experience of freedom from affective discipline. Of all the poem's critical appraisals, Kahn's is the one that most profoundly influences my own, and yet it speaks of "self-mastery," just as, going back to Christopher Hill's 1978 classic, *Milton and the English Revolution*, one learns that Milton celebrates "the triumph of reason over passion" (648, 414). The critical paradigm is far from arbitrary, of course: Milton narrates an encounter between Satan and the Son of God in which the latter is persistently "unmov'd" by the former's myriad temptations (3.386). The Son's steadfastness is at the center of the poem; my interest is the commodiousness of that category, which comes to include a wide spectrum of affective states.

Kahn makes a version of this point about the spaciousness of Miltonic steadfastness, but does not carry it quite so far: "It is important to see," she writes, "that this is patience of a very particular kind, one that includes impatience with those 'who count it glorious to subdue / By conquest'" (635). She also aligns such impatience with an evasion of zeal, an emotion I would join her in naming "satanic" (though my Miltonic reading of the Book of Job already suggests that satanic and divine agencies are not as different as they might seem): she notes the Son's "avoidance of theological politics and its apocalyptic rhetoric of zeal" (634, 650). I agree with Kahn's refinement of the category of "patience," which allows for a more supple reading of Miltonic steadfastness, and I share her sense that the poem asks its readers not to place their hopes in "zeal"—but I see Milton's unrestrictive "patience" and his withdrawal from zeal as examples of casual indifference. Indeed, a good definition of experimentalist affect could rest on exactly these two characteristics, since the experience in question consists of an undisciplined withdrawal from impassioned states (like impatience) that leaves open the possibility of exactly the sort of zealous intensity it seems to leave behind. The paradoxical inclusiveness of this state of feeling is a corollary of its freedom from discipline.

My reading of Milton as an experimentalist follows Joanna Picciotto's lead. His intimacy with Samuel Hartlib, Henry Oldenburg, and Katherine Boyle are well documented, and Picciotto has recently argued persuasively that his *oeuvre* can be read as a continuous labor of Baconian investigation.¹²⁵ The more immediate context for my reading of *Paradise Regain'd*, however, is

¹²⁵ See Picciotto ("Labors" 724ff21) for a bibliography of Baconian readings of Milton. See Picciotto ("Labors" 401 – 507) for the most thorough and compelling of these. I have also benefited from Rogers' illuminating discussion of Miltonic "matter," but my anti-materialist reading of Milton can only lead in a different direction.

my own account of experimentalist affect: the foregoing sections of this project show that Baconian intellectuals working in genres as distinct as the philosophical treatise, the meditation, and the topographical poem all share an interest in the epistemological advantages of carelessness. I suggest that Milton adopts the Jobean model I outline above, but reinvents it as a parable of casual indifference. Like the Book of Job, *Paradise Regain'd* is an undialectical poem that explores the capacity of affect to generate epistemological breadth. Whereas Jobean affect is a dialectical remainder—a vector of rage without an adversary (except the God for whom it is in fact a mode of reverence)—Milton replaces such abortive antagonism with carelessness. In other words, Milton eradicates the sliver of aggression the Book of Job retains. As I discuss below, however, this does not mean that *Paradise Regain'd* is emotionally flat. Just as Jobean rage creates an atmosphere of intense philosophical hunger, Miltonic nonchalance generates a space of casual inquiry in which hidden features of creation come gradually to light.

One advantage of my interpretation is that it solves the seemingly intractable problem of the poem's aesthetic effects, which are frequently cause for disappointment; scholars tend to describe the poem as an unaccountable letdown after the sublimity of *Paradise Lost* (1667). I believe Milton's great success in *Paradise Regain'd* is to forget what everyone thinks they know about the pleasures of reading. To put this differently, *Paradise Regain'd* is only disappointing in the narrow sense that it disappoints expectations about what counts as enjoyment; experimentalist affect opens new possibilities for literary pleasure—of which *Paradise Regain'd* is an exemplary instance. Stanley Fish describes “plot” as the poem's chief temptation, as if Milton were smugly denying the reader enjoyment in order to teach her a lesson. Lewalski notes that “many readers complain about the static plot, about the lack of tension resulting from the perfection and passivity of the hero, and especially about the ‘cold and negative’ renunciations whereby Christ appears to consign to the Devil the chief blessings of this world...” (4). These judgments raise questions literary scholars are usually too sophisticated to ask. Is *Paradise Regain'd* a bad poem? And if so, does one read it only out of a sense of obligation to the poet who penned *Paradise Lost*?

The unwitting but refreshingly blunt suggestion of plain badness is actually closer to the truth than the attempt to save the poem from its apparent “stasis.” Some scholars seek to explain inertia away by claiming to discover the subtle but persistent presence of martial epic or some other teleological narrative beneath the poem's surface. Lewalski, for instance, argues that “Milton meets the growing demand for a martial hero by a brilliant stroke. He is responsive to this expectation to the extent of using suggestive martial imagery to present the permutations of the argument between Christ and Satan as the thrust and parry of a great duel...” (104). This interpretation strains credulity; it is difficult to imagine a reader for whom a dialogue couched in martial metaphors would achieve even a vague resemblance to a chronicle of heroic warfare. And might not these metaphors actually underscore the profound distance between a poem of conversation and an epic in the vein of *Gerusalemme Liberata*? “[Milton] assumes,” she continues,

that his ‘fit audience though few’ will be more interested in the excitement, and the heroism, involved in the inordinately subtle and complex mental combat between Christ and Satan than in that provided by physical combat, and he uses—successfully, I think—the exposed predicament of the hero and the tremendous import of the battle for all mankind to supply the necessary tension. (105)

Here, “tension” is simply assumed as a “necessary” ingredient in poetry, and the paradigm for such tension seems to be the hyperbolically dialectical sort associated with wartime violence. No longer is Milton simply borrowing a martial rhetoric for a poem consisting mainly of dialogue: the reader is asked to view the Son’s conversation with Satan as a form of “mental combat” that surpasses the “excitement” and “heroism” of literal warfare by virtue of its “subtle[ty]” and “complex[ity].” Lewalski thinks there is a plot here, after all, and it is a triumphalist “battle for all mankind.”

Radzinowicz has less of a taste for blood, but she echoes Lewalski’s remark that Milton’s protagonist “undergo[es] a genuine adventure of testing and self-discovery” by suggesting that the poem should be read as the story of Christ’s “achievement of identity” (230, 109). It is as if Milton were a nineteenth-century novelist for whom the inward transformation of the protagonist were of primary importance—and the Son’s trial, a proleptic *Bildungsroman* in which he achieved self-understanding through experience. Kahn’s description of the “ironic temptation” is a much more persuasive point of departure, with its suggestion that the Son’s trial is not about self-transformation: ironic temptations “do not really tempt so much as provide an opportunity to exercise or display an already existing virtue” (631). The Son is virtuously “unalter’d” as early as Book 1: If the poem is about the “triumph of reason over passion,” the labor of self-mastery, or the achievement of messianic identity, then it ends before it begins (1.492).

Picciotto’s commentary on *Paradise Regain’d* seems to place her among the disappointed, but her formulation anticipates my argument. “To readers who invest the necessary care to curate *Paradise Lost*,” she writes, “what is wounding about its sequel is its shocking accessibility.... This is a poem in which a book can end with the brute statement, ‘So fares it when with truth falsehood contends.’ There seems to be no work left for us to do” (497). I suggest that Milton’s “accessibility” is “shocking” by design, though I favor a less forceful vocabulary. Milton’s “plain speaking” certainly *disarms* the reader, and this effect is not simply what happens when a sophisticated hermeneutic is brought to bear on a simplistic poem. Milton’s sequel differs from its predecessor by exploring the blankness of the world—the extent to which it does not always present explicit or even discernible epistemological obstacles. In some ways, this redoubles the challenge of looking past false appearances and into God’s creation: it is not simply that appearances are false, but that, moreover, they do not always make a show of their status as appearances. Even for the gimlet eye of the experimentalist, the world cannot be counted on to take shape as an emphatic distortion in need of correction. Even the most conscientious Baconian must occasionally come face to face with a world in which “there seems to be no work left for us to do.”

Conscientiousness is what most interests me about the wide field of experimentalist aesthetics: as the foregoing chapters explain (especially Chapter 1, Section 1), casual indifference accommodates the most laborious endeavors, so that what seems painstaking is experienced as leisurely pleasure. This means that the Baconian labor of discovery sometimes takes the form of careless observation—as it does in *Paradise Regain’d*.

Picciotto is the critic who most thoroughly explores the importance of labor to Milton’s project, so it is illuminating to juxtapose some of her observations with my own. Her magisterial reading of *Paradise Lost* shows that “Milton set about inventing an instrument of truth that was also an instrument of spectatorial education, an instrument that would instruct the reader in its own use” (435). *Paradise Regain’d*, I suggest, dispenses with those instructions: the power of the poem lies in its failure to tell us what to do. Picciotto accounts for the formal innovations of the great epic by showing that “the often obscurely lit spaces of *Paradise Lost* require the labor of an

agent inside,” an insight that becomes increasingly meaningful in light of her account of Eve’s error: “What the body hungers for above all is to rest in certainty; Eve hopes to consume ‘intellectual food’ without having to cultivate it” (438, 475). Where *Paradise Lost* requires the reader to work to generate images and to make sense of the text, one might say that *Paradise Regain’d* presents the reader with an opportunity to rest, but to do so in *uncertainty*—to experience the world as unchallenging and undisturbing in spite of the ever-present threat of epistemological error. The effect of this leisurely affect is not to encourage complacency with appearances; it is to prove that the epistemological openness achieved by the ingenious and painstaking reader of *Paradise Lost* might also be available in the experience of casual indifference. Where the earlier poem requires a vigorous response to the challenge of “obscurely lit spaces,” the sequel presents plain visibility as an opportunity for leisurely reflections that carry the eye and the mind beyond duplicitous surfaces.

My reading of *Paradise Regain’d* follows my interpretation of the Book of Job. I show that Milton develops a poetics of soft differences—of proximity without identification and separation without polarity. I then go on to demonstrate that carelessness is the mood in which such undialectical juxtapositions are performed. Ultimately, I show that Milton answers the Jobean claim that dialectical affect generates epistemological breadth by making the same argument for undialectical affect. Relative to other readings of *Paradise Regain’d*, perhaps the most surprising of my claims is that satanic rhetoric is the poem’s *raison d’être*. In fact, following an undialectical reading in which Satan is not sharply distinguished from the Son, I suggest that temptation is the location of the experience of receptivity around which the poem is organized. Scholars are perhaps overly narratological in their frustration with *Paradise Regain’d*—hence the “temptation of *plot*” (emphasis mine).¹²⁶ The poem has plenty of pleasures to afford, but they derive from the perceptual enhancement bestowed upon the reader by satanic speech.

IV. Soft Differences: Milton’s “Calmer Voyage”

Many scholars point out that Satan and the Son share a pronoun at the conclusion of *Paradise Regain’d*, and this phenomenon is always presented as a jolting surprise. While the Son is borne aloft by angels from the pinnacle of the Temple, Satan falls defeated to the earth, but the pronoun that should refer to the triumphant protagonist seems instead to point to his adversary:

So Satan fell and strait a fiery Globe
Of Angels on full sail of wing flew nigh,
Who on their plummy Vans receiv’d him soft
From his uneasie station, and upbore
As on a floating couch through the blithe Air... (4.581-5)

William Kerrigan’s intriguing psychoanalytic interpretation of the poem is typical of responses to the uncertainty of these lines. As he puts it, “The discursive thrust of *Paradise Regained* is toward this moment of definitive separation, of theophany and expulsion, but at just this time of clarity Milton riddles darkly...Christ and Satan inhabit, for a moment, the same *him*. The poem stops, arrested in mystery” (66). Kerrigan suggests that “mystery” suddenly interrupts an

¹²⁶ Picciotto’s reading shares Fish’s “impatience for something to happen” (“Labors” 495).

experience of clarity, sending the reader reeling from the shock of ambiguity. Elsewhere, Kerrigan speaks of “riddles” that “smite us with amazement” and of “the exasperating hint that there are two Sons of God” (67, 69). I suggest that one need not be “arrested,” “amazed,” or “exasperated” by a confusion of which the pronoun is only an example; the intimacy of Satan and the Son is no secret. Instead, the poem’s undialectical structure makes it possible to “receive” the satanic Son or the messianic Satan “soft[ly].” A Jobean reading would glide through the poem, unmoved by the confusion of identity. It would proceed peacefully, “as on a floating couch through the blithe Air,” unfazed by moments that render explicit the poem’s structure.

One clue that Milton’s Adversary is non-adversarial is the resemblance between the poem’s opening Invocation of the Muse and, less than a hundred lines later, Satan’s optimistic prediction of success in leading the Son astray. Milton asks the Spirit to “inspire” his “prompted song,”

And bear through highth or depth of natures bounds
With prosperous wing full summ’d to tell of deeds
Above Heroic, though in secret done,
And unrecorded left through many an Age,
Worthy t’have not remain’d so long unsung. (1.8-17)

Satan compares his present task with the temptation of Adam and Eve:

...a calmer voyage now
Will waft me; and the way found prosperous once
Induces best to hope of like success. (1.103-5)

Echoing Job’s desire for his story to be set down for posterity (“Oh, that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book!”), the poet asks the Holy Spirit to generate a “Song” that will end the long injustice of the Son’s “unrecorded” and “unsung” heroism. A “Spirit” that so “inspire[s]” is figured as a wind: the etymological metaphor is intensified when the “Spirit” “bear[s]” the song aloft with “prosperous wing.” Though Satan does not speak of “inspir[ation],” he uses the same adjective, “prosperous,” to describe his “voyage,” which is explicitly figured as a wind when it “waft[s]” him toward “success.” Similar draughts of air blow the poet and his villainous creation toward the performance of their respective tasks.¹²⁷

The poem’s most persistent and revealing undialectical strategy is the alignment of protagonist and antagonist, Satan and the Son. Again, this is not a productive antagonism (a relationship a modern reader would likely describe as “dialectical”), but the much less sophisticated and much more interesting phenomenon of mere complementarity. Scholars have

¹²⁷ Though scholars have yet to notice this convergence, they have managed to observe other such convergences without reevaluating their expectation that Satan’s speech should be understood as simply and patently duplicitous. Flanagan, for instance, generally reads satanic speech as a trap, even though he makes a point of identifying Satan’s opinion on tragedy with Milton’s. Referring to lines 261-6 of Book 4, he writes: “the summary is, I believe, a fair representation of Milton’s opinion of Greek tragedy and does not represent a distorted Satanic perspective” (772ff.84).

pointed out the resemblance between the Son's wandering in the desert and the experience of the Quakers, one of whom (Thomas Ellwood) apparently prompted Milton to write *Paradise Regain'd*: "Paradise is straightforwardly identified with the experience of being persecuted and harassed wherever one goes and continuing to wander along anyway; the lesson could hardly be simpler, or more plainly delivered. It is a generalized biography of Ellwood himself and his friends during the Restoration" (Picciotto 497). Yet the resemblance of the Son's wandering to the Quakers' also connects him with his adversary. When Satan first appears, he has been "roving still / About the world..."—an activity that both recalls the Jobean Satan who "go[es] to and fro in the earth, and walk[s] up and down in it" and simultaneously connects him to the wandering Son. Indeed, when the Son tells his tempter that he has no fear of being lost and hungry in the "barren Waste," he seems to echo the Jobean Satan's language: "Who brought me hither / Will bring me hence, no other Guide I seek" (1.33-4, 1.335-6). On the one hand, the Son claims that his apparent wandering is actually directed by God. On the other hand, his "hither" and "hence" recalls the "to and fro" and "up and down" of the biblical text—the distinctive rhetoric of satanic wandering. The "hither" and "hence" of the divinely ordained return from the desert calls to mind the this-way and that-way of satanic "roving."

Satan makes his resemblance to the Son explicit, though it is easy to explain his observation away as a "distorted Satanic perspective" (Flanagan 772, ff.84). If Satan's words are taken seriously, however, the undialectical strategy of *Paradise Regain'd* comes more clearly into view. Satan muses on the particular name with which Milton most often refers to Christ:

The Son of God, which bears no single sence;
The Son of God I also am, or was,
And if I was, I am; relation stands;
All men are Sons of God... (4.517-20)

"Relation stands" is a good summary of my point about an undialectical Milton. The poem continually explores the interactions of "relat[ed]" but non-identical figures, and such relatedness "stands" in the sense that it reverses the sort of dialectical vision occasioned by the Fall. Satan's perspective is right: he "was" a "Son of God" in the narratological sense that he was an angel prior to his rebellion against God and in the "genetic" sense that he was referred to with exactly this phrase in the Book of Job. And he resembles Christ—the person the poem repeatedly names "the Son of God." The satanic rhetoric that evades narrative transformation ("The Son of God I also am, or was, / And if I was, I am") resonates with the peculiar timelessness of the poem (its much complained of plotlessness), which unfolds within a mostly featureless desert in which Paradise is neither past nor forthcoming but discoverable "within" the experience of the present (*Lost* 12.587).

Satan's suggestion that names are fungible is similarly apt. Names are inexact in the double sense that *they might apply to more than one thing* and that *a single thing might bear a variety of names*—both of which would be trivial observations were it not for the importance of both to Milton's poetics of soft differences. The "Son of God... bears no single sence" much more explicitly than a phrase taken at random: Milton's favorite name for his protagonist (unlike the proper names "Christ" and "Jesus") is easily applied to others ("All men are sons of God," Satan says) and indeed, the term names a collective of which Satan is a part in the Book of Job. Elsewhere, Satan names Christ a "man of men," underscoring his resemblance to others (1.122). "Son of God" is not a narrowly specific term, but it is also true that the person to whom it is most

firmly attached also goes by other names: “Son of God” means both too much and too little. I am sympathetic to Picciotto’s argument that the word “Christ” is absent from the poem because “it is the singular hero of the redemption plot that the Son needs to see through” (because his redemptive labor would remove the responsibility of such labor from everyone else), but I am eager to qualify this point by reflecting on Milton’s poetics of soft differences (495). The poem is not especially interested in the idea of Christ, but it does not reject that concept entirely. I follow the conventions of criticism by referring to Milton’s protagonist as “the Son” or “the Son of God,” but he is also the “Son of Joseph,” the “Messiah,” “Jesus,” and the wonderfully concatenated “Jesus Messiah Son of God” (1.23, 1.272, 4.560, 2.4). Milton’s persistent but indefinite choice of “Son of God” from among these names is not the same as a decisive rejection of the others. Milton favors apposition over opposition.

The poem is quite explicit about a theology in which Satan and the Son cannot be read as embodiments of moral extremes. It is not only the Son who is his Father’s Son: Satan’s participation in divine action is explicit and uncontroversial. Sometimes, such participation seems involuntary:

But contrary unweeting he fulfill’d
The purpos’d Counsel pre-ordain’d and fixt
Of the most High... (1.126-8)

These lines indicate Satan’s role in divinely ordained events. He serves an undialectical function, but one that would seem to come as a surprise to him. In this way, it raises the possibility of an affective dialectic on the order of Job’s: Satan’s discovery that he has been manipulated might generate anger at the God who has enlisted him in a “fixt” plan.

Some of the Son’s remarks suggest as much, but they also indicate that Satan is “contrary” in a narrowly symmetrical sense, working in concert from another direction. “But thou art serviceable to Heaven’s King,” the Son tells Satan, the conjunction suggesting a reversal (1.421). Soon after, he extends the line of thought, mitigating that sense of surprise:

Thy coming hither, though I know thy scope,
I bid not or forbid; do as thou find’st
Permission from above; thou canst not more. (1.494-6)

These lines soften the implication that Satan is an “unweeting” instrument: the Son does not assert the authority implied by his divine consubstantiality, but simply shrugs at Satan’s presence. The Son does not have to steel himself against an adversary because Satan isn’t one: he neither “bid[s]” nor “forbid[s]” because he casually approves of Satan’s presence. These lines are an offhanded affirmation of the present state of affairs, even though the Son would seem to be in the midst of a dangerous trial.

And Satan, it turns out, knows very well his verbal joust with the Son is no genuine conflict. Following the logic of the “ironic temptation,” Satan compares his role in this conversation to the one he plays in the Book of Job:

I came among the Sons of God, when he
Gave up into my hands *Uzzean Job*
To prove him, and illustrate his high worth... (1.368-70)

Milton reminds the reader of Satan's place "among the Sons of God" as Satan explains that God freely "gave" Job "up into [his] hands," colluding with him in order to "illustrate" Job's "worth." Satan makes the same point about his dealings with Ahab, an "office" he "undertook" on behalf of God, and his subsequent account of his relationship with God beautifully suggests a poetics of soft differences (1.374). "For what [God] bids I do; though I have lost / Much luster of my native brightness," Satan says, describing a "loss" of "luster" distinct from utter extinguishment (1.377-8). Milton's poem is less chiaroscuro than shades of gray.

Satan's alliance with the Son is more than theological. Though the Son claims divine guidance in the desert, it seems that Satan directs his footsteps—much the way God seems to delegate responsibility to Satan in the Book of Job. But it is not as if the Son falls into satanic traps; to use a choreographic metaphor, one might say the Son follows Satan's lead. Indeed, virtually all the Son's experiences in the desert are curated by Satan. The following is a typical formulation of Satan's power over the Son, and of the Son's unresisting and unremarked upon docility:

With that (such power was giv'n him then) he took
The Son of God up to a Mountain high. (3.251-2)

This is a poem in which satanic power over Christ can be parenthetical. The Son is no vessel of divine majesty, but a "man of men" who receives the experience of satanic temptation without protest. A more extended example has the Son gradually entering a satanic milieu, but one that looks a lot like the Marvellian wood that opens "passable and thin" for the curious gaze of an "easy philosopher":

Up to a hill anon his steps he rear'd,
From whose high top to ken the prospect round,
If Cottage were in view, Sheep-cote or Herd;
But Cottage, Herd or Sheep-cote none he saw,
Only in a bottom saw a pleasant Grove,
With chaunt of tuneful Birds resounding loud;
Thither he bent his way, determin'd there
To rest at noon, and entr'd soon the shade
High rooft and walks beneath, and alleys brown
That open'd in the midst a woody Scene... (2.285-98)

Though the Son often expresses serene confidence about his knowledge of Satan's intentions ("I know thy scope"), he remains ignorant enough to deserve his historical resonance as a "Seeker"—as one who is without prepossession and waits on God's word (1.494). Here, it is the Son who is "unweeting" as he travels into Satan's "pleasant Grove" in search of "rest." Indeed, Milton's exact repetition of the words that name the Son's desires gently mocks him. The Son studies the landscape to find out "if cottage were in view, Sheep-cote or Herd," and the poem disappoints this desire by chiding such narrowly purposive looking: "But Cottage, Herd or Sheep-cote none he saw." Indeed, there is something absurd about the Son's hunt for a "Sheep-cote" in what he himself describes as "a barren waste" (1.354). On the other hand, what he does find seems equally impossible. The Son follows Satan's lead without suspicion, though this

“pleasant Grove” is in fact the space of temptation, and it is in this moment of cooperation that the poem’s flat “barren[ness]” gives way to the “resounding loud” of “tuneful Birds” and the “open[ing]” of “alleys brown” in a “woody Scene.”

This episode is a good emblem of the way *Paradise Regain’d* works: Satan and the Son act together in order to generate experiences the poem’s sparse setting would seem to preclude. The remainder of my discussion explores the affective dimensions of the Son’s undialectical encounter with Satan, and shows that the casual indifference of their conversation expands the reader’s “prospect.” First, though, and to bring this section to a close, I want to point out another consequence of Milton’s poetics of soft differences. The fact of Satan’s cooperative relationship with the Son, God the Father, and the poet’s voice are only the most blatant examples of a pervasive strategy. Another is Milton’s relationship with teleology, which brings into focus one of the central claims of the previous three chapters: that experimentalism is not always as “progressive” as it appears—and, when it is, “progress” often refers to a non-teleological mode of inquiry. In *Paradise Regain’d*, Milton favors the non-teleological dimension of the Christ story without flatly rejecting the alternative. The future is imagined without transforming the present into mere prologue.

Picciotto’s observation that Milton’s Son is not the Christ—the figure whose crucifixion would seem to remove the burden of restoring Paradise from his followers—is a good point of departure for understanding the poem’s relationship to its scriptural source. For me, however, the crucial point is that the Son is generally not the Messiah except for the rare occasions on which he is. Milton draws the reader’s attention away from the teleological salvation narrative that leads to the Passion, focusing instead on the present circumstance in which Satan and the Son merely converse. But just as Milton prefers to call his protagonist “Son” without eliminating the vocabulary of “Messiah,” his poem skirts the Christ story without throwing it away. If *teleology* denotes an end toward which everything prior is merely antecedent, then it is the wrong word for Milton’s salvation narrative. Here is a future that fails to bind the present—a provisional *telos* with which the present can remain blithely unconcerned.

The “inward oracle” is the promise of a salvation that requires no intercessor, and the poem’s emphasis repeatedly falls on the “inward” faculties of interpretation and action that everyone already possesses (1.463). Milton pictures the Son in a dilated present in which thought and action are perennially provisional; thus the poem can end by offering the Son the following instructions: “On thy glorious work / Now enter, and begin to save mankind” (4.635). In other words, everything contained in the poem’s four books is prior to the “begin[ning]” of the salvation plot, notwithstanding the hopes raised by the title. It is for this reason that the Son can answer Satan’s imperative to zealous urgency with a phrase that renders the triumphalism of sacred history parenthetical:

My time I told thee, (and that time for thee
Were better farthest off) is not yet come. (3.397-8)

The “not yet come” is the temporal equivalent of the poem’s “barren” setting: the wasteland of an extended present in which time is not an arrow.

Mary is nearly a foil to this perspective; she is the figure who most persistently draws the teleological Christ story into a poem that has little use for it. Her imperial rhetoric reminds the Son of his role in a narrative of conquest—the one he assures Satan has “not yet come.” “For know,” she tells him,

thou art no Son of mortal man,
 Though men esteem thee low of Parentage,
 Thy Father is the Eternal King, who rules
 All Heaven and Earth, Angels and Sons of men,
 A messenger from God fore-told thy birth
 Conceiv'd in me a Virgin, he fore-told
 Thou shouldst be great and sit on David's Throne,
 And of thy Kingdom there should be no end. (1.233-41)

Mary traces a path from the Annunciation of the Christ to his endless reign—a narrative arc that passes through the Passion and the Resurrection to the Second Coming and the establishment of Christ's permanent seat on "David's Throne." She repeats a term that suggests infallible prediction, explaining that God's messenger "fore-told" both the Son's birth *and* his eventual assumption of absolute power. The endlessness of the "Father" as the "Eternal King" mirrors the "Kingdom" of which "there should be no end," which the Son will eventually establish. On this understanding, the history of the present is only a chapter in a narrative in which earth is assimilated to heaven. Later, Mary repeats this insistence on the precedence of the Son's sacred *telos* over his current engagements, explaining how she merely waits out the present, which is only as a bridge to the future:

But I to wait with patience am inur'd;
 My heart hath been a store-house long of things
 And sayings laid up, portending strange events. (2.101-3)

Mary is a vessel of futurity. "Inur'd" to whatever happens in the present, she simply "wait[s]." Her "heart" is a "store-house" of "things" and "sayings" she "patien[tly]" conserves in expectation of their eventual fulfillment. The present is reduced to its capacity to "portend."

The Son's response to Mary's thoughts is compellingly ambiguous, as it both seconds and defers her teleological vision:

Thus *Mary* pondering oft, and oft to mind
 Recalling what remarkably had pass'd
 Since first her Salutation heard, with thoughts
 Meekly compos'd awaited the fulfilling:
 The while her Son tracing the Desert wild,
 Sole but with holiest Meditations fed,
 Into himself descended, and at once
 All his great work to come before him set:
 How to begin, how to accomplish best
 His end of being on Earth and mission high (2.105-114)

Mary "recall[s]" what has "pass'd" and "await[s] the fulfilling," again tracing the path of a triumphalist plot through time. The Son might be seen as sharing her frame of mind, since he "set[s]" his "work" "before him," emphasizing its narrative shape by asking "how to begin" and "how to...end." On the other hand, these lines can be read to suggest the opposite, confirming

his remark to Satan that the time for such a “mission” is “not yet come.” It might be the case that he “set[s]” his “work...before him” in the sense that he places it in front of him—that he places it *ahead* of him and frees the present from the imperative of its fulfillment. In these lines, “before” is a spatial metaphor: to “set” teleology “before” oneself might mean setting it aside for the future. Indeed, the Son’s “descen[t]” “into / himself” seems to present a contrast with Mary’s expansive vision of the passage of time. After all, the poem’s last words suggest that only after the poem ends does the Son “enter” “on...[his] glorious work”—a reminder that Milton has filled four books with postponements of the salvation story.

The Son’s account of his youthful ambitions is similarly double, juxtaposing the peaceful ease of present conversation with a future in which he mightily triumphs over evil:

...victorious deeds
 Flam’d in my heart, heroic acts, one while
 To rescue *Israel* from the *Roman* yoke,
 Then to subdue and quell o’re all the earth
 Brute violence and proud Tyrannick pow’r,
 Till truth were freed and equity restor’d:
 Yet held it more humane, more heavenly first
 By winning words to conquer willing hearts,
 And make perswasion do the work of fear... (1.215-23)

The Son’s vision of the future is as violent as Mary’s, though his language suggests liberation rather than dominion. His “victorious deeds” and “heroic acts” will “rescue *Israel* from the Roman yoke.” Even if his adversaries are named “Brute violence and proud Tyrannick pow’r,” his desire to “subdue and quell” them “o’re all the earth” suggests imperial conquest. “Yet,” Milton says, the Son chooses “first” a “more humane” and “more heavenly” pursuit: the exceedingly peaceful one of “conquer[ing]” only those “hearts” that are “willing,” and doing so with “winning words.” He replaces “fear” with “perswasion”—only temporarily, it seems, but such temporizing is the poem’s means of accommodating soft differences. Milton includes the teleology he postpones.¹²⁸ A similar point might be made about the Son’s triumphal rhetoric throughout the poem: it appears and disappears without taking pride of place.¹²⁹

The irony of Satan’s attempt to encourage the full embrace of teleology is that it repeats the rhetoric of soft differences I observe in Browne with respect to Judaism. “Prediction still,” Satan explains,

In all things, and all men, supposes means,
 Without means us’d, what it predicts revokes.
 But say thou wer’t possess’d of David’s Throne
 By free consent of all, none opposite,

¹²⁸ The Son also explicitly “lay[s] down” imperial aspirations: “Besides to give a Kingdom hath been thought / Greater and nobler done, and to lay down / Far more magnanimous, then to assume” (2.481-3).

¹²⁹ See, for example, the Son’s self-description as “a stone that shall to pieces dash / All Monarchies besides throughout the world...” (4.149-50).

Samaritan or Jew... (3.354-8)

“Prediction still” is an emblem of the poem’s relationship with teleology: the pun suggests a frozen prophecy—the expectation of a particular future, but one that fails to energize the present. “None opposite” is the synchronic equivalent of that diachronic image: the “soft” coexistence of what should create friction. As in Browne, mention of the “*Samaritan*” triangulates what might be an “opposit[ion]” between those “Jew[s]” who follow Christ and those who refuse. The diversity of parties undoes the dialectic, just like the inclusion of a futurity the poem fails to activate.

The capacity to include without affirmation defines the rhetoric of “soft differences.” Its structural analogue in this poem is the capacity to distinguish without exclusion. If by now the poem’s mutually reinforcing non-dualism and inclusiveness are clear, the next and final section illustrates the experimentalist consequences of those twinned strategies. The affective peace of Satan and the Son’s undialectical encounter opens the eye and the mind to the variegated features of the created world: as in the scientific and literary experiments of Bacon, Boyle, and Marvell, Milton’s casual indifference intensifies receptivity.

V. *Paradise Regain’d* and the Epistemology of Temptation

The interpretations of *Paradise Regain’d* to which I have taken exception treat Milton’s Son as a Stoic sage—no matter his description of Stoicism as a form of arrogance that deserves to be ranked “last in Philosophic pride” (4.300). The poem’s repeated indication that the Son displays a “firm obedience” and that he remains “unmov’d” surely suggests a proximity to Stoicism, but the distinction is likewise clear: such is the poetics of soft differences (1.4, 3.386). To be fair, the Son is likewise, and in the same breath, skeptical of exactly the state of feeling I suggest the poem itself tends to inhabit: he explicitly denigrates “careless ease” (4.299). The point of the previous three chapters (and of this one) is to articulate a flexible ethos of gentle awareness, the key feature of which is hyperbolic inclusiveness.¹³⁰ It is in this vein that I speak of a carelessness that should not be confused with the hedonism the Son disparages: the “careless ease” of these lines denotes a languorous devotion to mere “corporal pleasure.” The steadfastness upon which most of Milton’s critics remark is not what they think: it is not the immovable strength of Stoic constancy or the smug satisfaction of absolute certainty. Instead, I suggest, the Son displays a calm attention to whatever comes to pass. At times, he verges on blankness, emptiness—even bewilderment—as he adopts an attitude of unknowing receptivity. It may be

¹³⁰ Andrew Shifflett’s discussion is sensitive to the subtlety and flexibility of Milton’s ethos, which makes his Stoic reading of Milton weirdly compatible with mine, which is, to set aside “soft differences” for a moment, anti-Stoic. In the end, he argues that Stoicism is at the center of this poem, and I think it is at the edge, but Shifflett’s argument has a modesty that makes it attractive: “Nor am I interested,” he writes, “in determining which texts are truly Stoic and which are not. Even if such a survey were within my abilities it would, I believe, be antipathetic to these writers who so rightly exploited the casuistical tendencies of Stoicism to the fullest...” (3). This remark at once refreshingly modest, pointing only at an engagement with Stoicism and not at a full identification, and strangely elusive, since it permits the interpretation of explicitly anti-Stoic texts as Stoic. As Shifflett says of *Paradise Regain’d*, “The ‘working out’ of Stoicism requires in this case that Stoicism itself be rejected as a doctrine” (147).

correct to speak, with Lewalski, of the Son's "perfection," but such flawlessness is constituted by waywardness and confusion. Likewise, I affirm the poem's "stasis," but only in the narrow sense that it is not a narrative of unidirectional transformation or clear forward movement; it would be wrong to suggest that Milton's world is changeless.

Consider, for instance, the closing words of the "Angelic Quires," which attribute a wayward steadfastness to the Son, picturing the breadth of his experience as a measure of his constancy; he remains "the Son of God" no matter what "habit, or state, or motion" he inhabits (4.593). The angels envision him

Wandering the Wilderness, whatever place,
Habit, or state, or motion, still expressing
The Son of God... (4.600-2)

My interest is the force of this "whatever." Unlike the Lipsian model in which "wandering" would signal inconstancy, the Son's steadfastness takes a meandering form that exposes him to unforeseen events. His experience is not self-protective; it is not a matter of mere perception in which he might successfully guard himself from external situations. Instead, the poem imagines a wide spectrum of immersive experiences—by which I mean that those experiences cross the frontier between exteriority and interiority. The line break between "place" and "Habit" signals that crossing, the three final terms in the series suggesting the participation of the body and the mind in whatever happens to occur: "whatever place, / Habit, or state, or motion." The Son passes steadily from one situation to another, unconcerned by the experience of change.

Such waywardness does not sound like the "triumph of reason over passion." Milton reminds the reader continually of the Son's emotional serenity, but even such equanimity transforms as the poem proceeds. Walter MacKellar's account is typical of the scholarly impulse to assimilate the Son's serenity to Stoic *apatheia*, translating the Son's "calm" into the achievement of rigid emotional control. "Although in the course of the temptations," he writes, "Christ's temper becomes more and more strained, it is always firmly controlled" (133n). This observation is incorrect: the passage from "temperately" to "patiently" to "calmly" to "fervently" (these adverbs all describe modes of response to Satan's temptations) does not suggest any clear-cut progression toward "strained" but regulated "temper"; indeed, the last term in the series seems frankly impassioned (2.378, 2.432, 3.43, 3.121). The non-directional modulation of the vocabulary performs the metamorphosis of which the "Angelic Quires" sing. The thesis of self-control presupposes that Satan is an unambiguous villain to whom the Son must remain resolutely opposed; once the poem's nondualism comes into view, such rigid self-discipline makes less sense. Indeed, Satan's "stern brow" mirrors the Son's "unalter'd brow," and both are capable of carelessness (1.493, 4.367). While Milton writes explicitly that by Book 4 Satan is "in a careless mood," the Son's unhesitating response to Satan's seductive discourse a few lines later on indicates offhandedness more than strength of conviction: "So talked he, while the Son of God went on / And staid not, but in brief answered thus" (4.450, 4.484-5). Unconcerned with decorum, the Son cuts in.

The sort of calm on which the poem tends to dilate is a flexible state of tranquility that makes room for desire, worry, and other emotions, but seems never to be shattered by them. Even though Mary sometimes exemplifies "inur[ement]," Mary actually exemplifies this phenomenon—which makes a good deal of sense, since she is the character through whom a

mostly absent teleology enters the poem. In other words, she exemplifies the inclusiveness of the poetics of soft differences.

Within her brest, though calm; her brest though pure,
Motherly cares and fears got head, and rais'd
Some troubl'd thoughts... (2.63-5)

The repetition performs steadfastness even as it modulates the vocabulary that describes the experience: “her brest, though calm” becomes “her brest though pure,” so that change is visible even within the space of the emphatically stable heart. Such “calm” does not preclude “cares,” “fears,” or “troubl'd thoughts”: serenity is not a condition of rigorous indifference but a means by which to experience the passions.

The Son inhabits a similar emotional atmosphere when he feels the pangs of hunger. He does not occupy so rarefied a state of holy asceticism that he remains insensible to the desire for food. He explicitly “feel[s]” it but finds nourishment elsewhere:

But now I feel I hunger, which declares
Nature hath need of what she asks; yet God
Can satisfie that need some other way,
Though hunger still remain: so it remain
Without this bodies wasting, I content me,
And from the sting of Famine fear no harm,
Nor mind it, fed with better thoughts that feed
Mee hungring more to do my Fathers will. (2.251-9)

These lines might easily be read through the logic of repression: the Son might be seen as pushing his bodily desires away and embracing godly “thoughts” in their stead. But Milton is no materialist; the corporeal is not the real against which the spiritual is understood. In this respect, too, he is undialectical. The Son really is nourished by “thoughts”: he starves “without his bodies wasting.” His “better thoughts” are not sublimations for “the real thing”: they are just as real as food. And yet they are different from food. Milton does not depict a Christ who has transcended the need for food: he “feel[s]” his hunger, considers that “Nature hath need of what she asks,” and acknowledges that “hunger still remain[s]” in spite of the spiritual nourishment he receives. Indeed, such nourishment leaves him “hungring more” to serve God. In other words, the Son’s nonchalance here accommodates desire and satisfaction, each of a different order, simultaneously.

One of the poem’s more perplexing scenes explicitly frames the sort of stern self-discipline (“firm obedience”) associated both with Stoicism and with holy self-abnegation as a satanic temptation. One might call it “the temptation of obedience”—a willingness to repress one’s desires in the interest of God’s. Though the Son sometimes adopts a patriarchal rhetoric in which he “do[es] [his] Father’s will,” Milton signals that mere submission is sin. As Satan puts it,

I see all offers made by me how slight
Thou valu’st, because offer’d, and reject’st:
Nothing will please the difficult and nice,

Or nothing more then still to contradict:
 On the other side know also thou that I
 On what I offer set as high esteem,
 Nor what I part with mean to give for naught;
 All these which in a moment thou behold'st,
 The Kingdoms of the world to thee I give;
 For giv'n to me, I give to whom I please,
 No trifle; yet with this reserve, not else,
 On this condition, if thou wilt fall down,
 And worship me as thy superior Lord (4.155-167)

Having to express obedience in exchange for something is not the price but the substance of the temptation: there is a corrupt pleasure in submission. What is most interesting here is that the terms of the offer seem *worse* than those that precede it (as they do in scripture): none of the previous temptations required anything in exchange for what they promise. In this case, however, the Son would have to “worship” Satan and acknowledge him “superior” in exchange for his prize. One might read this simply as the temptation of idolatry—of worshipping a false god. And yet idolatry is already on offer in the other temptations. It seems to me that, coming as it does after many temptations in which something is given for nothing, submission is itself considered an especially effective temptation. In other words, this is the temptation of obedience, of believing that anything of value can be gained through the submission of oneself to another. And yet this is exactly what many critics hold as central to the Son’s success: his “firm obedience” to an authoritarian God, as expressed by his self-discipline and the repression of desire.

The Son’s response to this temptation brings into focus another aspect of casual indifference: its proximity to bewilderment and blankness. The Son is not always serene in his certainty; sometimes, he is calm in his ignorance. Thus the words with which he rejects the temptation of obedience are ill-chosen:

If given, by whom but by the King of Kings,
 God over all supreme? if giv'n to thee,
 By thee how fairly is the Giver now
 Repaid? (4.185-8)

This lame observation of Satan’s ingratitude is a non sequitur. Satan makes no claim to magnanimity, since he would require that the Son abase himself in exchange for “the kingdoms of the world.” The poem’s undialectical structure redoubles this sense of infelicity. Since Satan and the Son explicitly acknowledge that Satan acts in God’s service (he receives “permission from above”), the Son’s reproachful reminder that the divine “Giver” is not fairly “Repaid” feels out of place.

Scholars tend to assimilate the Son’s blankness to manly endurance—his “unalter’d brow” a sign of aloofness from temptation. But Satan and the Son actually share a pattern of bewilderment, ignorance, and confusion. Satan describes the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove at the moment of Christ’s baptism, but offhandedly admits that he does not understand what the dove represents: “what e’re it meant” is his casual aside (1.83). More often, Satan is bewildered by the Son’s rejoinders to his temptations. He is “confounded what to say, / What to reply, confuted and convinc’t / Of his weak arguing...” (3.2-4). Elsewhere, he is “quite

at a loss” (4.366). Sounding very much like the reader of *Paradise Lost*, as famously imagined by Fish, Satan “had not to answer, but stood struck / With guilt of his own sin...” (3.146-7).

It is not only Satan who is dumbfounded, confused, and scrambling for words. Although the Son is the poem’s central figure of serenity, he nonetheless manages to express an ignorance and confusion that draws him close to Satan. And he is capable of error, as the example of the temptation of obedience suggests. Sounding a lot like Milton’s Samson, the Son explains his desert wandering as follows:

And now by some strong motion I am led
Into this Wilderness, to what intent
I learn not yet, perhaps I need not know... (1.290-2)

The desert is both a literal and intellectual “Wilderness,” where the Son’s purposes are shrouded in mystery. Yet “perhaps,” the Son says, he “need not know” his aims. The encounter with Satan will not be Lewalski’s “great duel” in which truth definitively triumphs over falsehood. When Milton, immediately after these lines, describes the setting as “a pathless desert, dusk with horrid shades,” he recalls Job’s complaint: “He hath fenced up my way that I cannot pass, and he hath set darkness in my paths.” (1.296, Job 19:8). The Son does not effortlessly encompass all knowledge in the manner of God the Father; he is a “Seeker” whose calm derives from his willingness not to know.

Indeed, with respect to God’s intentions, the Son is not only willing to acknowledge uncertainty but to pose the open question, “What if?”

What if he hath decreed that I shall first
Be try’d in humble state... (3.189-90)

The question brings together the Son’s ignorance of divine purposes and Milton’s persistent preliminariness: the Son raises the issue of the postponed teleology, wondering about what will happen “first.” His rejection of zealous urgency repeats this avowal of ignorance, but with an added ambiguity. Does the Son know more than he is willing to share? In the following lines, he is referring to his eventual ascension to David’s Throne and perpetual reign on earth:

Means there shall be to this, but what the means,
Is not for thee to know, nor me to tell. (4.152-3)

Again, the Son affirms the poem’s wandering activity as a freedom from the logic of means and ends. But when he explains that the “means” of his triumph “is not for thee to know, nor me to tell,” he deploys a pun that Wordsworth, more than a century later, would make into a generative poetic motif. In “The Idiot Boy” (1798), which explores both ignorance and inarticulateness, this formulation is a refrain: “he cannot tell,” “she cannot tell,” “I cannot tell” (115, 269, 379). The expression raises the question of whether one “cannot tell” in the sense of not being able to *make something out* or in the sense of not being able to *say what that something is*. Milton leaves it unclear whether the Son is ignorant of God’s intentions or merely unwilling to share them; he inhabits an epistemological penumbra.

This observation brings me to the final aspect of Milton’s poetics I wish to explore: the status of carelessness as a form of receptivity. The Son’s encounter with Satan is persistently

characterized by gaps and lapses, blank spaces that function as conduits for experience. When Satan, in conversation with his demonic assembly, dismisses the idea of presenting the Son with the temptation of erotic desire, he asks,

What woman will you find,
Though of this Age the wonder and the fame,
On whom his leisure will vouchsafe an eye
Of fond desire? (2.208-11)

This is a compressed statement of my claim: “leisure,” which connotes both unoccupied time and emotional ease, names a space from within which one might “vouchsafe an eye” on whatever crosses one’s path. Satan rejects this sort of temptation because he doubts it will hold the Son’s attention; as it turns out, however, nothing does. Only “fond desire” fixes the gaze on a single object. The Son’s careless attention passes over all sorts of objects, none of which have the power to transfix. The Son does not resist the pleasures of vision so much as engage in a form of careless perusal that is simply incompatible with idolatrous admiration.

“Admiration” is exactly the term, calling to mind the Aristotelian tradition in which inquiry emerges from “wonder.” Satan articulates the problems associated with such dumbstruck fascination as he continues his explanation of the inadequacy of *eros* as temptation:

...for Beauty stands
In the admiration only of weak minds
Led captive; cease to admire, and all her Plumes
Fall flat and shrink into a trivial toy,
At every sudden slighting quite abasht:
Therefore with manlier objects we must try
His constancy, with such as have more shew
Of worth, of honour, glory, and popular praise;
Rocks whereon greatest men have ofttest wreck’d... (2.220-8)

Beauty receives the misogynistic dismissal of the anonymous “woman” referenced above. She is mere “trivial[ity],” an occasion for a frivolous dalliance. But the Son’s manner of looking escapes both “feminine” attachment and “masculine” power—escapes, that is, the binary. He neither shields himself from threatening appearances nor expresses contempt for them; he allows his eyes to pass over them without being “led captive” or “wreck’d.” What interests me is how close he gets to “captiv[ation].” The Son does not have to *resist* temptation because he is not in the habit of “admiration”; he casts a curious but never worshipful gaze on satanic spectacle. But the poem does not treat such spectacle as the sort of “trivial toy” from which interest should be fully withdrawn. The Son’s mode of looking is affectively charged but unexcited.

Satan disparages “admiration” because he does not think the Son is prey to it, but the Son objects to that emotion because it is unthinking. When he rejects Satan’s suggestion that he seek the sort of recognition due to the Messiah, he adopts an anti-populist rhetoric that belittles the people for their tendency to “admire” without understanding. “And what the people but a herd confus’d,” he says,

A miscellaneous rabble, who extol

Things vulgar, & well weigh'd, scarce worth the praise,
They praise and they admire they know not what;
And know not whom, but as one leads the other... (3.49-53)

“Admir[ation]” is “praise” without “know[ledge],” a capitulation to common wisdom. Though Milton seems focused on the democratization of innocent experience (with his newly accessible style and his celebration of an “inward oracle” available to everyone), here he depicts a less salutary democratization: “the people” become a “rabble” when they “admire” on the basis of popular opinion rather than engaging in collective inquiry.

Perhaps the Son and Satan’s shared blankness is an alternative to such prepossession. The poem creates a sense that all is wiped clean in the spaces between their conversations:

For Satan with slye peface to return
Had left him vacant, and with speed was gon
Up to the middle Region of thick Air,
Where all his Potentates in Council sate;
There without sign of boast, or sign of joy,
Sollicitous and blank he thus began. (2.116-20)

One modern editor ensures that the resonance between the Son’s “vacan[cy]” and Satan’s “blank[ness]” is repressed by explaining that “blank” is “always negative in Milton’s usage” (Flannagan 740ff29). Yet the affinity is flagrant. Since the poem seeks to create unemphatic occasions for perception and reflection without the encumbrance of common wisdom or any other set of premises, such emptiness is salutary. Its function is that of an open eye.

Paradise Regain’d shares the Book of Job’s interest in a poetics of visibility; it goes as far as to adopt the same refrain: “behold!”¹³¹ For both poems, the poetics of visibility draws a connection between the display of the protagonist’s virtue and the illumination of the surrounding world by way of that virtue. Milton often uses the language of “proof” to speak of such a demonstration. He observes that the Son is “by proof the undoubted Son of God,” and, in the same breath, asks the Holy Spirit to “bear” the poetic song “through highth or depth of natures bounds” (1.11, 13). In this way, one might speak of the double illumination of the Son: the casting of light *on* him and the casting of light *by* him. The latter accomplishes the former. When the poem concludes by returning the Son to “priva[cy],” it emphatically draws the curtain on what has been an explicitly public affair: “Hee unobserved / Home to his Mothers house private return’d” (4.639). As God tells the Angel Gabriel,

By proof thou shalt behold,
Thou and all Angels conversant on Earth
With man or mens affairs, how I begin
To verifie that solemn message late,
On which I sent thee to the Virgin pure... (1.129-35)

In these lines, God publicizes the Son. Not only Gabriel but “all Angels conversant on Earth” will see God’s “proof” of the Son’s divinity. Like the persistent preliminariness of Bacon’s

¹³¹ To give only a few examples from the first book, see 1.130, 1.269, and 1.386.

natural philosophy, the Son's double illumination is what God here only "begin[s]" to accomplish. Similarly, the Son is explicitly placed on display at his baptism, a sacramental beginning: he is "pointed at and shown, / In publick" by John the Baptist, a conventional image that takes on new meaning here (2.51-2). The poem is about looking before doing, and about looking as a kind of doing, but it is not about looking as a means to doing.

The Son's "exposure" to Satan is similarly framed:

...this man born and now up-grown,
To shew him worthy of his birth divine
And high prediction, henceforth I expose
To Satan... (1.140-3)

To "expose" the Son "to Satan" is quite literally to "expose" him: "to shew him worthy" by making his virtues visible. Satan acknowledges that God treated Job the same way, recalling how "...he / Gave up into my hands *Uzzean Job* / To prove him, and illustrate his high worth" (1.370). But the "expos[ure]" of the Son is not an experiment in the full sense that its outcome is unknown. God does not need to find out whether the Son's virtues exist, and he does not need to prepare him for what has been so "high[ly]" "predict[ed]" of him. If I can put it this way, however, the Son is a known quantity that can only be known by way of unknown quantities. His virtue is "presupposed," but that virtue ends up consisting in a freedom from presupposition. In other words, what is uniquely virtuous about the Son is his experimental ethos.

The Son's memory of his childhood specifies that "learn[ing]" and "know[ing]" are central to his earthly mission:

O what a multitude of thoughts at once
Awakn'd in me swarm, while I consider
What from within I feel my self, and hear
What from without comes often to my ears,
Ill sorting with my present state compar'd.
When I was yet a child, no childish play
To me was pleasing, all my mind was set
Serious to learn and know, and thence to do
What might be publick good... (1.196-203)

An exemplar of the affective experimentalism I have explored in these pages, the Son is at once steadily "serious" in his desire "to learn and know" and capable of a "swarm" of "thoughts" inconsistent with an understanding of dispassion as self-discipline. The Son's "serious[ness]" is not the repression of affect: it really is true that "no childish play...was pleasing" to him—that the Son's affinity for the "publick good" is a spontaneous one. His intent "consider[ation]" of the distinction between "what from within I feel my self" and "what from without comes often to my ears" is the project of every experimentalist.

The poem foregrounds natural phenomena, but "what comes from without" is a wide category, encompassing social, historical, linguistic, and supernatural phenomena. As in the Book of Job, the creatures that inhabit the natural world are a persistent presence. But unlike the Book of Job, *Paradise Regain'd* has not been taken seriously as a natural philosophical poem. One reason for this might be, as I have said, that the poem's Baconianism is not narrowly

focused on natural philosophy. Both the Son's wanderings and the discursive wanderings of satanic language broaden the poem's horizons, the casual indifference of the Son's encounters with people and things here doing the work of Jobean anger. Milton pictures his protagonist in a landscape as inhuman and unforgiving as the extra-moral cosmos of the Book of Job. The following passage from the first book is an instructive example:

Full forty days he pass'd, whether on hill
Sometimes, anon in shady vale, each night
Under the covert of some ancient Oak,
Or Cedar, to defend him from the dew,
Or harbour'd in one Cave, is not reveal'd;
Nor tasted humane food, nor hunger felt
Till those days ended, hunger'd then at last
Among wild Beasts: they at his sight grew mild,
Nor sleeping him nor waking harm'd, his walk
The fiery Serpent fled, the noxious Worm,
The Lion and fierce Tiger glar'd aloof. (1.303-13)

Milton describes the experience of the natural world as a mystery that might be illuminated: he narrates a wandering passage from "hill" to "vale," from the "dew[y]" damp of open land to the protection of the "Oak," "Cedar," or "Cave," but every step of this journey is conjecture. "Whether" the Son follows this itinerary or not, the speaker cannot say; it is, quite simply, "not reveal'd." The Son's gentleness induces the same in the creatures ("they at his sight grew mild"), and the dangerous ones keep their distance. There is something animal about the Son as well: he seems to join this environment as one of its members. When he finally grows hungry, he does so "among wild Beasts," the "wild[ness]" of which includes the connotation of ravenous hunger. Their unthreatening status is only miraculous because they are hungry—as creatures in a "barren Waste" are wont to be.

The speaker's descriptions of the natural world tend to be coordinated with the rising and setting of the sun, again interweaving a Jobean poetics of light and dark with the objects of natural philosophical inquiry:

For now began
Night with her sullen wing to double-shade
The Desert, Fowls in thir clay nests were couch't;
And now wild Beasts came forth the woods to roam. (1.499-502)

The "coming forth" of the "wild Beasts" coincides with the "double-shading" of the "Desert," so that the creatures emerge just as they fade from view. In this way, the poem designates those creatures as objects of curiosity. Meanwhile, the "Fowls" are "couch't" in their "nests," creating an atmosphere of quiet languor, and "Night" seems to resemble them as it draws its "sullen wing" over the scene. The coming of dawn occasions a metaphor that links the natural world, the poetics of light and dark, and an expansion of perception on the order of the "prospect round" the Son attains when he is drawn into the satanic wood:

And now the Herald Lark

Left his ground-nest, high tawring to descry
The morns approach, and greet her with is Song:
As lightly from his grassy Couch up rose
Our Saviour, and found all was but a dream... (2.279-83)

“The morns approach” and the “high tawring” flight of the “Herald Lark” comprise a redoubled metaphor of visibility (resembling the “double-shade” of the “Night”), so that perceptual amplitude is intensified by both the growing brightness and the bird’s angle of vision. “Our Saviour” resembles the soaring “Lark” by rising “lightly” into a morning in which the illusions of dream vision are instantly dispelled. The adverb, “lightly,” suggests that the poetics of light and dark have fully permeated the Son’s manner, so that the mere mechanics of rising from slumber feels like the coming of dawn itself.

The poem expands beyond the realm of natural history and achieves the “panoramic” vision of the Book of Job’s Voice from the Whirlwind through the medium of satanic temptation. Unlike most of Milton’s interpreters, I am not suspicious of Satan’s optical technologies: they accord perfectly with a poem in which the Son’s encounter with Satan is the chief occasion for perceptual breadth.¹³² The scholarly thirst for “something to happen” in this poem is answered by the wild inclusiveness of Satan’s discourses. When Satan effortlessly whisks the Son to the mountaintop, the speaker emphasizes how much the Son can see from such a height: “...and so large / The Prospect was, that here and there was room / For barren desert fountainless and dry” (3.263-5). Satan’s emphasis is similar: “Turning with easie eye thou may’st behold” what turns out to be another temptation (3.293). “Cast round thine eye,” he says, after cleverly deploying an “Aerie Microscope” to expand the Son’s realm of vision (4.61, 4.57). The fluctuations in scale Satan produces with his lenses are also the poem’s achievements, the Son and the reader sharing the experience of confused and layered observation. Here is a fragment of the vision of Rome Satan curates for the Son:

Porches and Theatres, Baths, Aqueducts,
Statues and Trophees, and Triumphal Arcs,
Gardens and Groves presented to his eyes,
Above the highth of Mountains interpos’d
By what strange Parallax or Optic skill
Of vision multiplied through air, or glass
Of Telescope, were curious to enquire... (4.36-42)

The speaker’s uncertainty about the mechanism by which such a vision is possible (“Parallax or Optic skill...or glass of Telescope”) parallels the Son’s confused vision of the features of Rome, mysteriously “interpos’d” above the mountains. I do not see why they speaker’s comment that such mysteries “were curious to enquire” has to be understood pejoratively; indeed, the poem takes it as an occasion for reflection. The vision of Rome is a compelling compromise between ocular drift and the sifting and sorting of an intelligent observer: the eye seems merely to wander from one object to another, and yet proscenia (“Porches and Theatres”) give way to vessels of

¹³² “Severing his own personal dependence on the outward symbol of his spectatorial privilege,” Picciotto writes, “Milton hands his instrument of truth over to Satan before it can become an idol, another inert exterior” (494).

water (“Baths, Aqueducts”), before the architecture of celebratory memory (“Statues and Trophees, and Triumphal Arcs”) gives way to the terrain of leisure (“Gardens and Groves”). The reader and the Son engage in a protracted experience of looking that is intellectually active but persistently casual. “Nor does this grandeur and majestic show / Of luxury . . . allure mine eye,” the Son says (4.109-12). The temptation only tempts if one’s practice of observation is acquisitive.

I offer a single example of the function of temptation (beyond what I say about satanic optical technologies), in the hope that it encourages further interest in the epistemological opportunities afforded by Satan’s endlessly fascinating rhetorical performances. The following passage, which I quote at length, presents an array of objects for study that are only inducements to sin in the narrow sense that they present an opportunity for “allure[ment].” The Son’s practice of careless observation shows that they might be perused without desire:

Our Saviour lifting up his eyes beheld
In ample space under the broadest shade
A Table richly spread, in regal mode,
With dishes pil’d, and meats of noblest sort
And savour, Beasts of chase, or Fowl of game,
In pastry built, or from the spit, or boyl’d,
Gris-amber-steam’d; all Fish from Sea or Shore,
Freshet, or purling Brook, of shell or fin,
And exquisitest name, for which was drain’d
Pontus the *Lucrine* Bay, and *Afric* Coast.
Alas how simple, to these Cates compar’d,
Was that crude Apple that diverted *Eve*!
And at a stately side-board by the wine
That fragrant smell diffus’d, in order stood
Tall stripling youths rich clad, of fairer hew
Then *Ganymed* or *Hylas*, distant more
Under the Trees now trip’d, now solemn stood
Nymphs of *Diana*’s train, and *Naiades*
With fruits of flowers from *Amalthea*’s horn,
And Ladies of th’*Hesperides*, that seem’d
Fairer then feign’d of old, or fabl’d since
Of Fairy Damsels met in Forest wide
By Knights of *Logres*, or of *Lyones*,
Lancelot or *Pelleas*, or *Pellenore*,
And all the while Harmonious Airs were heard
Of chiming strings, or charming pipes and winds
Of gentlest gale *Arabian* odors fann’d
From their soft wings, and *Flora*’s earliest smells,
Such was the Splendour, and the Tempter now
His invitation earnestly renew’d. (2.338-68)

The speaker notes the “ample space,” underscoring the spaciousness of the scene by placing it “under the broadest shade.” The glutton’s table functions as a collection of specimens. Indeed,

the first of these are exactly the natural specimens that have been lurking at the edges of the poem: “Beasts” and “Fowl.” They are presented “in pastry,” the better to seduce the greedy—but the Son knows no such rapacity. What Satan calls his “far fet spoil” really is a collection of rarities, with its ambergris, its “noble meats,” and its fish of “exquisitest name.” The passage is astonishingly comprehensive: land animals give way to sea and river creatures, before the passage highlights each of the senses in turn—moving beyond the initial “lifting” of the Son’s “eyes” to the sense of taste (“noblest...savour”), smell (“*Arabian* odors”), sound (“chiming strings”), and touch (“gentlest gale”). Even the rejected temptation of physical beauty makes an appearance here, in both male and female form (“Tall stripling youths rich clad, of fairer hew / Then *Ganymed* or *Hylas*,” “Ladies of th’*Hesperides*, that seem’d / Fairer then feign’d of old”). “*Amalthea*’s horn” is an apt figure for the overabundance of sensory experience compressed into these 30 lines. The endless enjambments, along with the close apposition of all these materials in a sinuous list, encourage the reader to share the Son’s gentle passage through Satan’s feast. Far from transfixed—but equally distant from stern disinterest—the reader passes lightly over the array of objects. One might say Milton makes a *Wunderkammer* of the cornucopia.

In this way, Milton creates an emblem of the poem’s strategy: he juxtaposes, postponing judgment. Distinctions between good and evil belong to a future that is not yet in the offing. For the moment, the reader enjoys the pleasurable display without the deep satisfactions of aesthetic sublimity or cognitive certainty. The cool flow of the poem is an apotheosis of Jobean nondualism. With the dissolution of anger, Milton conducts an unprecedented experiment in the poetic possibilities of frictionless thought. If other experimentalists explore the conceptual and affective potential of undialectical rhetoric, Milton might be said to make an immersive environment of their language. *Paradise Regain’d* offers an experience of heatless intensity in which nothing is asked of the reader except to read to the end.

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