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LITERARY DISORDER: THE POETIC REVOLUTION, 1600-1666

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation theorizes a new understanding of “imitation,” the central objective and operation early modern writers prescribed for fiction, better known in the period as “poesy.” Reading poems, plays, and fictional prose from canonical authors, John Donne, William Shakespeare and Thomas Middleton, Francis Bacon, and Margaret Cavendish, I uncover expressions of imitation as a process that cultivates not resemblance but disorder: disassembly and (sometimes) recombination. The texts I study thus portray procedures of fiction-making that literary theorists—from classical antiquity to the present day—have not acknowledged, but procedures that enabled the early modern version of imitation: poesy should not merely copy nature but should create or make it anew. Over the course of the seventeenth century, disorder became a new method by which fiction imitated nature. This method for imitation became especially appropriate in this century, when natural philosophers, like Bacon, began to confront how little they knew certainly about nature, that nature was a system of constant variety, generation, and creation. My re-definition of imitation as disorder illuminates that poesy captured this truth about nature through, what I call, literature’s “poetics of disorder.” “Poetics of disorder” are the strategies by which poesy creates ongoing variety and change—through specific literary devices, like the metaphysical conceit, or, in Cavendish’s estimation, by

recreating, diverting, and withdrawing. Imitating nature's dynamism, this poetics shows both that trying to map nature's processes—as natural philosophers strove to do—was and is not the only way to demonstrate understanding of nature and that literature is not simply a frivolous exercise of style or imagination, but a knowledge-making enterprise in its own right.

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Introduction

One of the most entrenched principles in early modern literary theory is that fiction—better known to scholars of the period as “poesy”—imitates nature. While over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, “nature” could mean a variety of things—the physical, environmental world; *not* the *appearance* of the physical, environmental world but rather its processes: the “creative workings of nature”; and, especially after the mid-seventeenth century, “humane life” or human activities and behaviors—assessments of poesy’s relationship to nature stayed firm.¹ Sir Philip Sidney’s *The Defence of Poesy* (1595) is most often tagged as forwarding this conception of poesy as imitative, but Sidney is not alone: Roger Ascham in *The Scholemaster* (1570), Henry Peacham in *The Garden of Eloquence* (1577), George Puttenham in *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), and later Thomas Hobbes in his response to William D’Avenant’s *A Discourse upon Gondibert* (1650) all peddle a vocabulary of imitation, following, copying to describe poesy’s work.² My project does not dispute the thesis that

¹ The first definition of nature is an Aristotelian one. See, especially, S.K. Heninger’s explanation of a shift in the mid-fifteenth century from “the Christianized version of Plato’s realm of essences to the empiricist’s world of observable nature. A work of art became a representation of what exists in fact, rather than a presentation of what is *supposed* to be in ideal principle” (original italics). By the mid-sixteenth century, Aristotle’s *Poetics* had influenced poetic making to “represent[t] the actions of men in naturalistic surroundings.” “For Sidney and Aristotle, mimesis of the visibilia of cosmos rather than mimesis of its form became the motivating concern of poetic theory.” S.K. Heninger, Jr., *Sidney and Spenser: The Poet as Maker* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), 64 and 87. On the second definition, see Gavin Alexander, ed. *Sidney’s ‘The Defence of Poesy’ and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 323n.27. See Thomas Hobbes, “The Answer of Mr. Hobbs to Sr. William D’Avenant’s Preface before Gondibert,” in *A Discourse upon Gondibert. A Heroick Poem* (Paris, 1650), 130 for the last. See also Arthur O. Lovejoy, “‘Nature’ as an Aesthetic Norm,” *Modern Language Notes* 42, no. 7 (Nov. 1927): 444-450, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2913933>.

² Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesy*, in Sidney’s *‘The Defence of Poesy’ and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, 3-54. Roger Ascham, *The Scholemaster, Or plaine and perfite way of teachyng children, to vnderstand, write, and speake, the Latin tonge, but specially purposed for the priuate brynging vp of youth in Ientlemen and Noble mens houses, and commodious also for all such, as haue forgot the Latin tonge, and would, by themselues, without à Scholemaster, in short tyme, and with small paines, recouer à sufficient habilitie, to vnderstand, write, and speake Latin* (London, 1570). Henry Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence onteyning the figures of grammer and rhetorick, from whence maye bee gathered all*

poesy is mimetic, but it asks (and proposes) how: How does early modern poesy imitate nature? What actually occurs in the act of imitation? What do poesy's processes of imitation look like in practice, as the text unfolds?

Despite his high profile, on this topic, Sidney is not as enlightening of the inner workings of mimesis as one might think. Yes, he writes in his *Defence of Poesy* that "Poesy, therefore is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in the word *mimēsis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting or figuring forth."³ Yes, scholars have abundantly theorized each of these different actions—representing, counterfeiting, and figuring forth.⁴ However, this gesture to, but ultimately lack of explanation of, imitation's specific actions combined with Sidney's confusing dicta that poesy imitates nature but is not subject to it—that it "grow[s] in effect into another nature" and "mak[es] things either better than nature bringeth forth or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature"—has

manner of flowers, coulours, ornaments, exornations, formes and fashions of speech, very profitable for all those that be studious of eloquence, and that reade most eloquent poets and orators, and also helpeth much for the better vnderstanding of the holy scriptures (London, 1577). George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy: A Critical Edition*, ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

³ Sidney, *Defence*, 10.

George Puttenham offers a similar definition: "a poet may in some sort be said a follower or imitator...both a maker and a counterfeiter." Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, 93.

⁴ Some of the classic and more recent contributions to this discussion include Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1981); Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); Derek Attridge, "Puttenham's Perplexity: Nature, Art, and the Supplement in Renaissance Poetic Theory," in *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, ed. Patricia Parker and David Quint (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 257-79; Heninger, *Sidney and Spenser*, esp. 287; Neil Rhodes, *The Power of Eloquence and English Renaissance Literature* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992); Arthur F. Kinney, "The Position of Poetry: Making and Defending Renaissance Poetics," in *A Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture*, ed. Michael Hattaway (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2002), 340-351; Henry S. Turner, *The English Renaissance Stage: Geometry, Poetics, and the Practical Spatial Arts 1580-1630* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Clark Hulse, "Tudor Aesthetics," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1500 to 1600*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 29-63; Gavin Alexander, "Seeing through Words in Theories of Poetry: Sidney, Puttenham, Lodge," in *A Companion to Tudor Literature*, ed. Kent Cartwright (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 350-63; Ryan J. Stark, *Rhetoric, Science, and Magic in Seventeenth-Century England* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009); Erika T. Lin, *Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

resulted in overwhelming focus on the poetic product: what poesy imitates and what it makes by representing, counterfeiting, figuring forth.⁵ Instead of elaborating the steps of these processes, Sidney reinforces a rather opaque sense that poesy's product balances untethered imagination and reference to nature: it is "not wholly imaginative...but a particular excellency as nature might have done."⁶ Slightly more illuminating, Sidney's claim that poesy creates a "golden" world to nature's "brazen" one seems to direct us to think about those products through comparison and resemblance to their predecessor.⁷ We first look to what exists in nature in order to imagine a more resplendent alternative. While Sidney derides poesy that simply copies what is seen in nature, he implies that poesy's products should be familiar, exhibit traces of, or have clear differences from what came before. Tracking verisimilitude or trying to understand how poesy negotiates newness and reference, however, has diminished attention to discussions of process, as if the way that a poetic product resembles its referent—or *that* a poetic product resembles its referent—explains poesy's procedures.

To correct this conflation of product and process, my project seeks to more satisfactorily name and illuminate the processes by which seventeenth-century poesy imitates nature. To be clear: I am not countering Sidney, but I endeavor to describe what precisely occurs in an act of imitating that also requires producing something new. In doing so, I add to the chorus of voices working at the intersection of literature and science (in historically-appropriate terms: poesy and natural or experimental philosophy) who are correcting a long-held belief that literature is somehow subordinate to science—

⁵ Sidney, *Defence*, 8-9.

⁶ Sidney, *Defence*, 9.

⁷ Sidney, *Defence*, 9.

either because literature does not deal only in observations of the real world, and therefore whatever knowledge or ideas it produces are not as helpful for living in the world, or because literature and its devices are seen as secondary helpmates to knowledge about nature acquired through observation of the cosmos or experimentation.⁸ As I'll discuss below, scholarship has subordinated poesy to natural philosophy partially because of the myopic view of poetic mimesis as creating verisimilitudes, trafficking in resemblance. This view naturally creates hierarchies, hierarchies that trap us into describing only *what* poesy is—an embellishment, something golden—rather than describing *how* it creates anew. Shifting focus to poesy's processes for creating anew requires and enables us to properly name and describe poesy's dynamic relationship with nature with more specificity than simply "imitation."

I argue that over the course of the seventeenth century poesy created anew by disordering—"deliberately rearranging"—nature.⁹ "Deliberat[e] rearranging" is certainly on the milder side of definitions of "disorder," which, in its earliest uses in English, was associated most often with lying or a rift in the relationship between God and man.¹⁰

⁸ These voices include Katherine Eggert, *Disknowledge: Literature, Alchemy, and the End of Humanism in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Claire Preston, *The Poetics of Scientific Investigation in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); several contributing authors to Howard Marchitello and Evelyn Tribble, eds., *The Palgrave Handbook to Early Modern Literature and Science* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), including Marchitello and Tribble in their introduction (xxxiv), Liza Blake, "Lyric and Scientific Epistemologies: Bacon and Donne" (199-214), and Wendy Beth Hyman, "'Deductions from Metaphors': Figurative Truth, Poetical Language, and Early Modern Science" (27-48, esp. 27-8).

⁹ This is Puttenham's definition of "tolerable" disorder. See Puttenham, *Art of English Poesy*, 252 and 247n.3.

¹⁰ In English, "disordre" appears first in an anonymously-compiled and -translated volume of lessons from ancient philosophers, set down first in Latin, then in French, then translated into English, and published in 1477 by William Caxton. The volume includes lessons from Homer, Aquinas, Plato, and others. The chapter on Plato is where we find "disordre" as the consequence of "workis doon by lesingis [lyings]." See *The saynges or dictis of the Philosophers* (London, 1477), 36. For the translation of the middle English "lesingis" or "lesen," see *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. Robert E. Lewis, et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952-2001), <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED25217> (accessed January 26, 2021).

However, within just one hundred years of its first usage, it came to modify operations or order, rather than simply signifying sinfulness, error, or crippling destruction. In fact, contrary to the early-sixteenth-century, and even our modern, sense of “disorder” as somewhat pejorative, the etymological history of the prefix “dis-” suggests that “disorder” is a kind of motion or a doing—not simply negation, as is often assumed. Only one of the *OED*’s definitions of “dis-” references negation; the others explicate it as meaning, “in twain, in different directions, apart, asunder,” separation, division, solution, undoing.¹¹ Disorder indicates both a specific kind of making *and* the process of making at work.¹²

Three examples of “disorder”—two in early modern poesy, one in early modern criticism of poesy—capture these meanings. In *A Hundreth sundrie Flowres* (1573), the feigned editor George Gascoigne creates to comment meta-critically on the composition of his poetic miscellany remarks that he handles “doings which have come to my hands, in such disordred [*sic*] order, as I can best set them down.”¹³ Calling the verses “doings”

In the sixteenth century, “disorder” appears in a variety of contexts—descriptions of war, medical manuals, and, most often, religious tracts warning men against the behaviors that would sever their connection with God. One finds “disorder” most often in the last context, partially because Erasmus used it in an explication of 1 Corinthians 7, parts of which were reprinted many times over the the rest of the century. Erasmus uses “disorder” when he describes orders of consecrated men who only appear to perform their primary service, charity toward others: “O what weywarde and disordered ordres be these whiche wille perverte and destroye all the ordinances and lawes of god...” See Erasmus, *An exhortation to the diligent studye of scripture, made by Erasmus Roterodamus. And tra[n]slated in to inglissh. An exposition in to the seventh chapter of the first pistle to the Corinthians* (London, 1529), n.p. For “disorder” in military contexts, see Salust, *Bellum Jugurthinum*, trans. Alexander Barclay (London, 1525), vi: the fall of the Roman Empire “confounded bothe the lawes of god and man and by the same were all good ordinaūces disordred.” For “disorder” in a medical context, see Heironymus Brunschwig, *Liber de arte distillandi*, trans. Laurens Andrewe (London, 1528), n.p, where the physician prescribes “Water of Brunella” for a womā that is rente or disordred in the byrthe of her chylde that she can not kepe her water or vrin.”

¹¹ “dis-, prefix,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2020, <https://www-oed-com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/Entry/53379> (accessed January 26, 2021).

¹² Megan Heffernan, *Making the Miscellany: Poetry, Print, and the History of the Book in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming 2021), 11. I thank Professor Heffernan for allowing me to read and cite her forthcoming book.

¹³ George Gascoigne, *A Hundreth sundrie Flowres Bounde vp in One Small Poesie* (London, 1573), 306.

figures them as instances of making something, making something that the editor clearly has trouble identifying and transmitting. The editor's comment gives the impression of him grappling with something in the process of becoming—an impression underscored by “disordred,” which implies that the “doings” are not yet in a state he would call “ordered.” The editor's remarks elucidate the fact that “disorder” signifies a way of becoming (becoming through disorder), a state or stage of that process (the chaotic middle of becoming), and—more familiarly—a condition (lacking a recognizable order or even a sense of how things can or should relate). Unlike Gascoigne's “editor,” the speaker of Robert Herrick's “Delight in Disorder” praises the inchoateness disorder makes. The speaker expresses a preference for art that engages in a “Sweet disorder” and balks at precision, specifically when imitating nature.¹⁴ Beyond associating disorder with making or suggesting vaguely that it means a lack of precision, Puttenham helpfully clarifies what disorder looks like, noting, as I cited above, that “tolerable” kinds and figures of disorder are those that effect a “deliberate rearranging of the order, not an absence thereof.”¹⁵

Disassembling and recombining objects found in nature is precisely what I claim poesy does in this period. Thus disorder is, in Megan Heffernan's words, “the expression of an active, evolving, and changeable form.”¹⁶ “Active, evolving, and changeable” could have very well been found in a seventeenth-century definition of nature, something Francis Bacon regarded as tending toward change and variety.¹⁷ Thus, I argue that what I

¹⁴ Robert Herrick, “Delight in Disorder,” in *The Complete Poetry of Robert Herrick*, ed. J. Max Patrick (New York: Norton & Co., 1968), 41, lines 1 and 14.

¹⁵ Puttenham, *Art of English Poesy*, 252 and 247n.3.

¹⁶ Heffernan, *Making the Miscellany*, 10.

¹⁷ See Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, ed. Lisa Jardine and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Bk. 1, Aphor. 66, pg. 53-55; Bk. 2, Aphor. 29, pg. 148-149; Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, in *Francis Bacon: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford:

call literature's "poetics of disorder" preserves aspects of nature: its variety, persistent dynamism and unpredictable irregularity. Poesy imitates nature's processes of ongoing becoming. While natural philosophers like Bacon dedicated themselves to identifying nature's causes and effects—effectively, *why* the world looks the way it does—I argue that poetic making illustrates one important step in *how* new creations come about: through disordering what already exists. In other words, literature disorders nature as one way of imitating it.

From Resemblance to Variety, from *Res* to *Res*

The next four chapters will explore both canonical and not-so-canonical occurrences of this poetics, so I want to begin with a hyper-canonical example of the tradition I'm modifying: imitation as a referential or resemblance-based practice.¹⁸ Often—though not always—Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (c. 1595) appears to exemplify resemblance-based creation. In three similar worlds—Athens, the forest outside of it, and Pyramus and Thisbe's mythic garden—pairs of lovers—Theseus and Hippolyta, Titania and Oberon, Hermia and Lysander, Helena and Demetrius, Pyramus and Thisbe—face similar troubles: from star-crossed or scorned love to struggles of power. In addition to these shades of characters and worlds, there are the

Oxford University Press, 2002), 123, 178, 197. Hereafter citations of *The Advancement of Learning* will be from this edition, unless otherwise noted, and abbreviated *AL*.

¹⁸ Stephen Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) is an excellent study of poetic mimesis, from classical to modern literature, that also concludes that poetic mimesis need not be resemblance-based. See especially 14, 44-64, and 155-74. See also Arne Melberg, *Theories of Mimesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Specific to early modern literature, see G.W. Pigman III, "Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance," *Renaissance Quarterly* 33, no.1 (1980): 1-32, esp. 4-7, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2861533>, and Greene, *Light in Troy*, esp. 38-45 for a breakdown of different kinds of imitation.

fairies—Titania, Oberon, Puck, and their attendants—and not to mention Bottom-turned-ass-head, all illustrations of what Sidney demands poesy creates: “forms such as never were in nature, as the heroes, demigods, cyclops, chimeras, furies, and such like.”¹⁹ But in three of these four cases (Titania, Oberon, and Bottom) these seemingly other-worldly creatures are very familiar. Titania and Oberon mimic Theseus and Hippolyta, and nothing about Bottom changes except his head (and a slight braying speech impediment).²⁰ Titania and Oberon, the fairy queen and king, would also have us believe that the forest outside Athens which they inhabit is a “golden” world to Athens’ “brazen.” In this forest a flower struck by Cupid’s arrow, “Before, milk-white; now, purple with love’s wound,” if applied appropriately, will make a “disdainful youth”

Prove
More fond on [a sweet Athenian lady] than she upon her love.²¹

The “Before...now” logic that governs both of these examples does not illustrate the kind of disassembly, rearrangement, and ongoing change we expect from disorder; rather these examples simply illustrate a full conversion to an opposite. Oberon means to turn Helena from love-sick to beloved. With its re-conjugations of star-crossed or scorned lovers, with its chimeras and fairies, and with its plots to expressly improve its characters’ lives, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* abounds with the products that illustrate a mimetic practice based around likeness and difference.

That is, the path to the golden world (or simply the proliferation of varieties) is

¹⁹ Sidney, *Defence*, 8-9.

²⁰ That is, the only change is to Bottom’s head if the production decides to actually have him *appear* transformed. A production that choose to forego the prop would, then, suggest that Titania actually fantasizes about asses—not that she is only attracted to this creature because she has been enchanted. Oberon remarks that he’ll anoint Titania’s eyes with juice from a flower that will “make her full of hateful fantasies.” See William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, ed. Peter Holland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 2.1.258.

²¹ Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, 2.1.166, 260-1, 265-6.

not via disorder but simply via resemblance. Helena's perspective articulates this quite clearly: to imitate Hermia, Helena begs that she might "catch" Hermia's voice,

my eye your eye,
My tongue should catch your tongue's sweet melody.²²

Later she frames her whole misfortune as mistaken commensurability:

What wicked and dissembling glass of mine
Made me compare with Hermia's sphery eyne?²³

Clearly articulating one model of imitation that undergirds this play, Helena also bemoans the misfortune to which this model leads: Helena can only see herself as Hermia's foul copy.

Resemblance-based imitation is also one of the paradigms by which poesy and nature relate in this play. Dialing in on how the play's logic of poetic creation relates to early modern meditations on the "'nature of nature,'" in *Shakespeare's Double Helix* (2007) Henry S. Turner postulates that the play's process of poetic creation shares affinities with the occult sciences—magic, astrology, alchemy—in vogue in the mid- to late-sixteenth century. These sciences, he observes, "presume an underlying principle of resemblance."²⁴ For Henry Cornelius Agrippa, one of these occult scientists, magic consists in "the attracting of like by like, and of suitable things by suitable."²⁵ What he called the "world-spirit" that gives life to all things spreads through a process of self-replication "by a certain likeness, and aptness that is in things amongst themselves toward their superiors."²⁶ Turner argues that Shakespeare embeds a similar philosophy in his

²² Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1.1.187-9.

²³ Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 2.2.104-5.

²⁴ Henry S. Turner, *Shakespeare's Double Helix* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 42.

²⁵ Henry Cornelius Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, ed. Donald Tyson and trans. James Freake (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1993), 110.

²⁶ Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, 106.

poetry when, for example, Titania describes one of her votresses:

When we have laughed to see the sails conceive
And grow big-bellied with the wanton wind,
Which she with pretty and with swimming gait
Following, her womb then rich with my young squire,
Would imitate, and sail upon the land
To fetch me trifles, and return again
As from a voyage, rich with merchandise.²⁷

Both the votress' belly and her movement "follow," or copy, the winds that blow across the land and fill ships' sails, making them "big-bellied."²⁸ This passage suggests that poetic creation follows nature, imitates nature, by resembling it: the votress' belly and her stride resemble the effects of the wind. This kind of play—a play of reference, of resemblance—indicates that poetic creation, in its representing, counterfeiting, and figuring forth, strives for stability: poesy should create new forms, but that newness should be predictable and controlled by a careful balance of sameness and difference between original and offspring.

However, there are two other models of poesy *A Midsummer Night's Dream* offers. At the end of the play, Theseus articulates his idea of poetic mimesis, one that foregrounds the poet's ranging imagination as his creative motor²⁹:

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.³⁰

The lack of vocabulary like "follow" distinguishes Theseus' conception from Titania's

²⁷ Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 2.1.128-34.

²⁸ Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 162n.131.

²⁹ See Sidney, *Defence*, 9.

³⁰ Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 5.1.12-17.

earlier one: there is a tentativeness in Theseus' explanation that the poet's eye merely "glances" at heaven and earth, a tentativeness that suggests the things of heaven and earth only inspire what the poet's imagination "bodies forth." This tentativeness means, of course, that we cannot look to Theseus' explanation for a precise definition of poetic process, except to say that imagination does not just help the poet alter what already exists, but it helps him create things completely unknown—to assemble things from heaven and earth into something unpredictably new. Unpredictability is at the heart of one last model of poetic creation the play manifests through Puck, Oberon's mischievous attendant and, according to Turner, Shakespeare's best example of mimesis because he is "a figure for Proteus," a shape-shifter. Puck "never settles into any singular form but mutates across a spectrum."³¹ This last process of poetic creation, then, does not strive for stability or resemblance; it instead encourages constant, unsettling mutation with no *telos*. Indeed, Sidney's description of poesy using the present progressive—representing, counterfeiting, figuring forth—testifies to poesy as not so much a single event, a flipping of a switch from original to copy, as an ongoing process.³²

This conception of mimesis as ongoing being and becoming was particularly appropriate for the seventeenth century because of a shift in what language was expected

³¹ Turner, *Shakespeare's Double Helix*, 78.

³² More precisely, Turner as well as scholars like Jenny C. Mann, Debapriya Sarkar, and Colleen Rosenfeld have been at the forefront of recognizing that poesy is "a doing." See Colleen Ruth Rosenfeld, *Indecorous Thinking: Figures of Speech in Early Modern Poetics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 4.

The last 10 years has also seen intense excavation of "figure," uncovering a historically-appropriate conception of it—and its cognate, "form"—as "an ongoing interaction of being and becoming." For this phrase, see Jenny C. Mann and Debapriya Sarkar, "Introduction: 'Capturing Proteus'," in "Imagining Early Modern Scientific Forms," ed. Jenny C. Mann and Debapriya Sarkar, special issue, *Philological Quarterly* 98, no. 1/2 (2019): 6. See also Marjorie Levinson, "What is New Formalism?," *PMLA* 122, no. 2 (March 2007): 558-69, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25501722>; Henry S. Turner, "Lessons from Literature for the Historian of Science (and Vice Versa): Reflections on 'Form'," *Isis* 101, no.3 (September 2010): 578-89, <https://doi.org/10.1086/655795>; Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

to figure forth. That is, the emergence of poesy imitating nature's dynamism may have come from the shift in the meaning of *res*, from subject matter and abstract concepts in the sixteenth century, to physical matter and natural things in the seventeenth century.³³ The new meaning of *res* also indicated the already-ongoing shift away from understanding the universe in Aristotelian terms and using Aristotelian logic.³⁴ The texts I read indicate that poesy's mimetic processes followed suit: moving from Aristotle's idea of mimesis as not imitating exactly what is seen in the world but rather imagining what can and should be "according to the rules of verisimilitude" to more Quintilian and Senecan views of poetic art that forwarded imitating variety.³⁵ While insisting that the poet "fix [their] eyes on nature, and follow her,"³⁶ Quintilian adds that the poet should have multiple models giving us "our stock of words, the variety of our figures, and our methods of composition."³⁷ Putting an even finer point on the matter, Seneca insists on a truly composite process, one that, in fact, mimics natural activity: we should "copy the bees and sift whatever we have gathered from a varied course of reading" to "blend those several flavours into one delicious compound that, even though it betrays its origin, yet it nevertheless is clearly a different thing from that whence it came."³⁸ Quintilian and, to an even greater degree, Seneca endorse a process not of copying one single thing but rather

³³ A.C. Howell, "Res et Verba: Words and Things," *ELH* 13, no. 2 (June 1946): 131-142, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2871594>, and Alexander, introduction to *Sidney's 'The Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, xxv.

³⁴ Mary Thomas Crane, *Losing Touch with Nature: Literature and the New Science in Sixteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014) illuminates the ways literature marked the origins and terms of this shift.

³⁵ Alexander, introduction to *Sidney's 'The Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, xxxi.

³⁶ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, vol. 3, ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 8.3.71.

³⁷ Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, vol. 4, 10.2.1.

³⁸ Seneca, *Ad Lucilium epistulae morales*, trans. Richard M. Gummere, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 84.5-8.

of composing from, mixing and blending, various sources. They indicate that imitation should not be so concerned with maintaining reference or reproduction in a way that faithfully maintains something, but it should capture growth, variety, change and compositeness. If we follow Quintilian and Seneca, we should identify imitation as processes of creating variety instead of resemblance.

The Third Wave of Literature and Science Studies

While devised millennia before the seventeenth century, this model for imitation becomes especially appropriate at the moment when natural philosophers, like Bacon, began to confront how little they knew certainly about nature, that nature, itself, was a system of constant variety, generation, and creation—a system Bacon depicted, as I’ll discuss in chapter 3, as the shape-shifting Proteus.³⁹ By the end of the century, this conception of nature as dynamic, chaotic, and vitalist was well entrenched, as I’ll discuss in chapter 4. My re-definition of imitation as disorder illuminates that poesy captured this truth about nature, while the “poetics of disorder” I identify is how poesy depicted change and variety. Thus, I argue for disorder as a method of poetic mimesis that instantiates a historically-particular kind of transformation: transformation that does not seek resolution but just endless, variety-producing change. This conception of disorder is inspired not just by the literature I read below, but also by the appearance of “disorder”

³⁹ In our modern age, as early as 1941, historians of science began to acknowledge that science is not properly a body of knowledge but rather a process itself. See Charles Singer, *A Short History of Science to the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1941), 1 and Howard Marchitello, “Science Studies and English Renaissance Literature,” *Literature Compass* 3, no. 3 (2006): 341-365, esp. 346, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2006.00318.x>.

alongside muchness, infinity, and diversity in Sir Thomas Elyot's definitions of a sequence of twenty words, all containing variations of the "multi-" prefix.⁴⁰ Elyot's dictionary attests to an historical association between disorder and producing variety.

Reading seventeenth-century examples of prose, poetry, and dramatic poetry that disorder nature, I join a recent, new movement in the nearly century-long lineage of historians and literary scholars who seek to clarify the relationship between early modern literature and natural philosophy. Howard Marchitello defines the first two waves of this work. The first beginning in the 1930s and lasting until at least the 1970s, was a "triumphalist model of science" that not only put science above imaginative literature as a discipline and progenitor of knowledge, but it also claimed a one-way direction of influence. Marjorie Hope Nicolson helms this approach with claims like, "The poetic and religious imagination of the century was not only influenced, but actually changed, by something latent in the 'new astronomy.'"⁴¹ Never reversing the direction of influence, this first wave also insists that seventeenth-century literature that engaged with scientific questions or topics was merely reflective of the scientific work being done.⁴²

The second wave, beginning in the 1970s (and, I would claim, beginning to ebb now), studies how science is socially embedded and how knowledge about nature is meaningfully influenced by cultural factors, including literature. Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer's *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (1985) is the model for this work, but Claire Preston, Mary Thomas Crane, Frédérique

⁴⁰ See Thomas Elyot, *The dictionary of syr Thomas Eliot knyght* (London, 1538), n.p. The specific entry containing "disorder" is for "Multo & Mulcto."

⁴¹ Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Science and Imagination* (Ithaca: Great Seal Books / Cornell University Press, 1962), 2.

⁴² Marchitello, "Science Studies and English Renaissance Literature," 348.

Aït-Touati, and Jacqueline Cowan have more recently detailed literature's and literary device's particular influence on natural philosophy, especially how early modern literature interpreted, and thus produced new ideas for, natural philosophy.⁴³ Preston identifies "two-way traffic between the discursive and intellectual practices of the imaginative, the fictional, the linguistic, and the rhetorical, and those of the empirical, the investigative, the experimental, and the technical."⁴⁴ She puts an even finer point on the matter, suggesting a "co-dependent, mutually influential relationship between literary and scientific expression."⁴⁵ Crane focuses on the literary devices shared between literature and science. In each chapter of her most recent book on the subject, *Losing Touch with Nature: Literature, Alchemy, and the End of Humanism in Renaissance England* (2014), she argues how a literary technology—allegory and metaphor in Book 5 and the *Mutabilitie Cantos* of *The Faerie Queene* (1596), for example—served the goal of natural philosophy: to render intelligible the material world.⁴⁶ Aït-Touati, too, begins her book, *Fictions of the Cosmos: Science and Literature in the Seventeenth Century* (2011), with an account of what science owes fiction: "the truth and the credibility of the cosmological discourse are not constructed (only) *in opposition to* but *with* fiction."⁴⁷ Kepler, for example, "confers on fiction not only a role of transferring knowledge but also an ontological significance in explaining the physical world."⁴⁸ Cowan clears up any remaining doubts: "the poet and natural philosopher performed the same work, albeit in

⁴³ Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

⁴⁴ Preston, *The Poetics of Scientific Investigation*, 6.

⁴⁵ Preston, *The Poetics of Scientific Investigation*, 8-9.

⁴⁶ Crane, *Losing Touch with Nature*.

⁴⁷ Frédérique Aït-Touati, *Fictions of the Cosmos: Science and Literature in the Seventeenth Century*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 17, original emphasis;

⁴⁸ Aït-Touati, *Fictions of the Cosmos*, 23.

different ways...they each harnessed the imagination to shared ends,” to aid discovery in the real world.⁴⁹ While I do not at all dispute the co-constituency of literature and science, both products of culture and tools for creating knowledge, I worry that in tracking fiction’s influences on natural philosophy the purposes and operations of fiction have too easily been made congruent—to the point of near elision—with those of natural philosophy. The excitement over shared discourses and rhetorical practices has led too easily to treating fiction and natural philosophy as strategies with the same epistemological frameworks and the same goal: to uncover the secrets of the real world.

Marchitello and Evelyn Tribble, his co-editor of *The Palgrave Handbook of Early Modern Literature and Science*, writing in 2017, believe that we are still very much in this second wave, viewing literature and science as “mutually sustaining and mutually informing systems for the production of knowledge.”⁵⁰ However, I propose that a new approach has emerged, one that maintains a sense of poesy as producing knowledge, yes, but one that underscores that the knowledge it creates is different from that which natural philosophy produces, and poesy’s strategies for creating knowledge are distinct from natural philosophy’s. Liza Blake has recently articulated this position as a difference in epistemologies. Lyric poetry, she argues, has its own way of thinking through questions of the operation of human intellect. While Bacon employs aphorism to address these questions, lyric uses allegory.⁵¹ Katherine Eggert’s idea of “disknowledge” theorizes the difference Blake and others observe: “poetry choos[ing] to know things in its own

⁴⁹ Jacqueline Cowan, “The Imagination’s Arts: Poetry and Natural Philosophy in Bacon and Shakespeare,” *Studies in Philology* 113, no. 1 (2016): 133. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43921881>.

⁵⁰ Marchitello and Tribble, introduction to *The Palgrave Handbook of Early Modern Literature and Science*, xxxiv.

⁵¹ Blake, “Lyric and Scientific Epistemologies,” esp. 213.

way.”⁵² Eggert describes poesy as a “strategic ignorance.”⁵³ When we choose to make knowledge through poesy, we consciously and deliberately “se[t] aside...one compelling mode of understanding the world—one discipline, one theory—in favor of another.”⁵⁴ The persistence of alchemy well into the seventeenth century despite other methods that produced more “accurate” knowledge of the world is a scientific example of this decision and phenomenon. The persistence of alchemy indicated that not all intellectual endeavors strove for knowledge about the real world or knowledge that could necessarily help one to live in the real world. On this account, Eggert proposes that “alchemy provides a model by which literature may divorce itself from humanism’s outmoded aim to make language accurately reflect—and thus be able to influence—the world.” “Neither alchemy nor poetry...is an art of discerning the world as it is.”⁵⁵ While Sidney and others said just as much centuries ago when they imagined the poetic world as golden to nature’s brazen or imagined that poesy occupies a possible space of what nature “might have done,” we are only now starting to diagnose *how* poesy creates its own knowledge, knowledge that natural philosophy did not produce.⁵⁶

Seeking to reproduce in order to explain nature, natural philosophy actually demonstrates the kind of resemblance-based practice literary criticism has traditionally ascribed to poesy.⁵⁷ Natural philosophy does not seek to create something new; it seeks to confirm an idea by trying to regenerate the conditions that make it true. However, poesy

⁵² Eggert, *Disknowledge*, 208.

⁵³ Eggert, *Disknowledge*, 42.

⁵⁴ Eggert, *Disknowledge*, 3.

⁵⁵ Eggert, *Disknowledge*, 207.

⁵⁶ Sidney, *Defence*, 9. See also Julius Caesar Scaliger who defines poetry as narrating “not only actual events, but also fictitious events as if they were actual, and represented them as they might be or ought to be.” Julius Caesar Scaliger, *Select Translations from Scaliger’s Poetics*, trans. Frederick Morgan Padelford (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1905), 1.1.2

⁵⁷ I am grateful to Wendy Beth Hyman for making this observation in a personal conversation recently.

has a different project—a creative rather than confirmatory project—and therefore a different set of non-replicatory procedures. I examine literature’s disorderly practices in order to shed light on an overlooked poetic revolution: a methodological transformation—coincident with similarly-momentous methodological transformations in studying nature, known as the scientific revolutions⁵⁸--that made literature not simply a frivolous exercise of style or imagination but a knowledge-making enterprise in its own right. That transformation entailed illuminating what it looks like to make. In other words, while poesy certainly provided alternative epistemologies, the poetics of disorder I study provides the knowledge of what it looks like to make those alternatives.

Surveying places where fictional texts create new ideas about nature—like the relationship between body and soul, what it means to be human, and principles of motion—my dissertation finds that poesy strives to make variety. That variety is present in chimeras, fairies, and demi-gods, yes, but the variety I observe is also didactic: various ways of categorizing, various ways of making new knowledge. My dissertation shows how disorder played an integral part in seventeenth-century poesy creating all three—

⁵⁸ Twenty-five years ago, Steven Shapin cautioned that there was “no essence of the Scientific Revolution”: while the study of nature certainly changed in the seventeenth century, there was no “singular or discrete event, localized in time and space, that can be pointed to as ‘the’ Scientific Revolution,” and “there was [no] single coherent cultural entity called ‘science’ in the seventeenth century” that could undergo change that would be called “revolutionary” in the early modern period. To early moderns, “revolutionary” meant “recurring,” not the more modern sense of “radical and irreversible reordering...bringing about a new state of affairs that the world had never witnessed before and might never witness again.” See Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 12, 3.

While I share Shapin’s immense care for language, the fact is that the intervening quarter century has not produced a more suitable term than “scientific revolutions” to capture how critical the seventeenth-century work of Bacon, Hobbes, Boyle, Cavendish and others was to exploring and understanding nature. Some of that work, like, especially, Bacon’s and Hobbes’, was “critical” because it crystallized or was a culmination of prior work. Some of that work was “critical” because it was so strangely innovative, like Cavendish’s. While the pluralization—“revolutions”—addressed Shapin’s first concern, we apparently just don’t have a better word than “revolution” to describe the production of copious, epistemologically-transformative, and related yet diverse work that all occurs in such a short span of time.

I justify my use of “poetic revolution” on the same grounds: the texts and authors I study profoundly (yet diversely) affected the early modern sense of what poesy did and what kind of knowledge it produced.

variety, new nature, and knowledge.

*

In four chapters, my dissertation reads texts by major seventeenth-century authors—John Donne, William Shakespeare and Thomas Middleton, Francis Bacon, and Margaret Cavendish—that disorder what is found in nature or theorized by natural philosophy. My chapters are arranged chronologically in order to chart how this conception and execution of imitation evolved over the course of the century. I begin with a chapter on John Donne, the poet-priest whose poetry about souls and worlds was a tremendous source for the first wave of science and literature studies. In “Making Fitter Forms: Donne’s Poetics and the Human,” I study four poems by Donne—“Air and Angels” (c.1600), “The Extasie” (c.1600), a verse epistle to the Countess of Bedford, “Madam, you have refin’d me” (c. 1610), and *The First Anniversary* (1611)—that figure the human as an unstable and heterogeneous form instead of as a single kind of organic body, as it was historically conceived. Motivating these figurations was Donne’s desire to find the fittest form for the part of human essence with gloriously innumerable characteristics: the soul. Critics called Donne’s inventive and occasionally affronting meditations on body, soul, and what it means to be human, *discordia concors*—known also as “metaphysical conceit”—the combination of dissimilar characteristics or images such that what is figured doesn’t resemble anything natural. While maligned for departing so far from nature, metaphysical conceit enables Donne to explore conceptions of the human that disregard categorical distinctions between the human and nonhuman,

like when he figures the Countess of Bedford in terms of—not merely as *like*—a season, a day, the Book of Nature, and her country estate Twickenham. Metaphysical conceit transforms one thing into something new. Thus Donne’s poetry models metaphysical conceit as a device that fosters poesy’s disordering.

While my first chapter captures poetic disorder working upon a range of objects—from something’s shape to its ontology—my second chapter focuses on one play’s incarnation of disorder as a genre and as a process of world-making. “‘Let confusion live’: A Poetics of Satire from *Timon of Athens*,” studies how Shakespeare and Middleton’s *Timon of Athens* (c. 1608) theorizes and deploys a specific process for mixing discordant things: confusion. I argue that “confusion” and “confound,” which are used more times in this play than in any other by Shakespeare, describe the poetic operation of *Timon of Athens*’ satire. “Confusion” and “satire” are etymologically linked: the former derives from the Latin *confundere* and refers to processes of blending, mixing, and mingling as well as diffusing, suffusing, and spreading over, while “satire” comes from *satura*, meaning, a mixture, a hotchpotch. The play develops what I call, a “confused poetics”: it creates by mixing constituent parts in such a way that the product cannot be classified satisfactorily by measuring likeness to or difference from any of its constituent parts or predecessors. A “confused poetics” endorses, therefore, a conception of poetic imitation as a process of mixing that produces an object whose identity is too multiple to be secured or described as overwhelmingly resembling one of its constitutive parts. By adopting confusion, instead of resemblance, as its poetic operation, *Timon of Athens* re-envision the art of imitation and the subsequent attributes of the golden world poesy figures as ambiguous ethically, politically, and even in terms of what is meant by

“life.”

Continuing the work of articulating disorder’s operations, *how* it creates anew, my last two chapters chart the evolution of poesy’s purposes and procedures during the heyday of and in response to the New Science and its attendant methods. I read Bacon’s and Cavendish’s fictions and natural philosophies side-by-side in order to emphasize the distinctive ways poesy produces new knowledge by disordering natural philosophy’s ways of creating and representing knowledge about nature.

In the third chapter, “Francis Bacon’s Works of the Imagination: Varying Forms of Knowledge-Creation,” I argue that Bacon’s fictions—specifically *Wisdom of the Ancients* (1609) and *New Atlantis* (1627)—illustrate a new form of knowledge-representation and knowledge-making that differs from induction, the method proposed and illustrated in Bacon’s natural philosophical texts. I mean “form” in the very particular Baconian sense where it describes the steps or movements by which something comes to be—a sense that has inspired the recent re-articulation of “form” in early modern studies as something that moves and a process. According to Bacon, “form” is something’s “law of act or motion” or “the source of its coming-to-be.”⁵⁹ A collection of thirty-one ancient and mythic fables, re-told and analyzed for their moral, political, or natural philosophical meanings, *Wisdom of the Ancients* is comprised of entries that follow several different forms. Instead of following the strict order of observation, interpretation, conclusion Bacon theorizes and employs for induction, sometimes Bacon recounts a story of the mythological figure and afterwards analyzes each detail; at other times, he intersperses

⁵⁹ Bacon, *The New Organon*, ed. Jardine and Silverthorne, Bk. 1, Aphor. 51, pg. 45; Bk. 2, Aphor. 1, pg. 102; Karl R. Wallace’s description is also helpful: form is “a kind of behavior, or a kind of event or motion. See Karl R. Wallace, “Francis Bacon and Method: Theory and Practice,” *Speech Monographs* 40, no. 4 (November 1973): 249, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637757309375803>.

this work, not only interrupting the flow of the story but also inserting his untimely presence as a non-ancient interpreter into an ancient story. Thus, beyond re-ordering induction's form of and protocols for knowledge-creation, Bacon employs a feature of story-telling found in fictional prose genres, especially romance: re-ordering narrative time.⁶⁰ A fabricated story about shipwrecked sailors who encounter a hidden, scientifically-advanced society with millennia's worth of advancements, *New Atlantis*' narrative disorders past, present, and future in order to construct a narrative that puts learning and understanding above all else. Disordering the strict sequence and progression of induction and proliferating various forms of knowledge-representation and -creation, Bacon's fictions manifest variety, one of the core principles of his Great Renewal of natural knowledge. Therefore, not only do these texts sit alongside his pure natural philosophies and induction in terms of enabling learning and discovery, but they surpass them in manifesting a truth about nature—its variety—that induction fails to capture.

My first three chapters endeavor to show how disorder in its various incarnations—as metaphysical conceit, as confusion, or as an actual logic or plot for creating and representing knowledge—is a tool for thinking and creating anew instead of a tool for destruction. My last chapter turns to Margaret Cavendish, the only author who actually theorized poetic mimesis anew and as specific kinds of endless, variety-producing procedures—in other words, as specific kinds of disorder. Focusing on Cavendish's first and last hybrids of fiction and natural philosophy, *Poems, and Fancies* (1653) and *The Blazing World* (1666), “Margaret Cavendish's Vitalist Poetics,”

⁶⁰ On the form of the romance, see Patricia A. Parker, *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

diagnoses Cavendish's theory of poetics in light of her conception of fiction-making as recreation, diversion, and withdrawal. These characterizations harken back to the core of her theory of vitalist materialism, a theory of infinite matter and motion. I argue that in both images and the composition of the work, her fictions exhibit this principle of infinite and unpredictable change: *Poems, and Fancies* first explicates a theory of erratic atomistic motion that serves as the basis for successive descriptions, in prose and poetry, of ever more complex worldly objects, from the human mind to an entire government, while *The Blazing World*, not certainly a utopia, shifts between modes of romance, philosophy, and fantasy. In demonstrating the features of Cavendish's vitalist materialism, the texts prompt re-theorization of the principles of fiction-making: poesy as a process that does not insist upon resemblance as a crucial component of imitation but rather creates by recombination.

In proposing disorder as poesy's mimetic operation, I aim to initiate a fundamental conversation about what and how poesy makes at a moment in British history when intellectuals were departing from entrenched wisdom and methods for constructing knowledge. Indeed, with the scientific revolutions, civil war, plague, regicide, and, what I've called, the "poetic revolution," the seventeenth century was fraught with disorder. Endeavoring to model how to read and see the fruits of the poetic revolution, my dissertation proposes a way to understand the century's disorder as not destructive but creative.

Making Fitter Forms: Donne's Poetics and the Human

In early modern European natural philosophy and theology, the “human” is a combination of soul and an organic body with the organs, bones, and features of what we have called *homo sapiens*. Across Europe, in the first half of the sixteenth century, philosophers, physicians, and anatomists became especially attentive to the bodily half: the particularities that made a body “human.”⁶¹ Andreas Vesalius’ anatomical handbook, *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543)—or, *The Fabric of the Human Body*—is a touchstone in this work, which, Vesalius admits, he undertook partly to correct teachings from the predominating Galenic medical tradition, including its understanding of the human body derived from dissections of apes.⁶² The advancement from the Galenic model was also a move away from a conception of the human body as highly permeable, composed of its environment, and “fluid.”⁶³ Vesalius’ intervention may have been so successful and generative because it limited humanity to a single kind of physical body, helpfully

⁶¹ Gabriele Zerbi’s *Liber anatomiae corporis humani et singulorum membrorum illius* (Venice, 1502) represents the more philosophical tradition in that this massive anatomy book largely compares previous anatomical texts. More practical handbooks, handbooks that document the body from dissection, include Alessandro Benedetti, *Historia corporis humani sive Anatomice* (Venice, 1502); Jacopo Berengario de Capri, *Commentaria super anatomiam Mundini* (Bologna, 1521) and *Isagogae breves* (Bologna, 1522); and Charles Estienne, *De dissectione partium corporis humani libri tres* (Paris, 1545).

⁶² See *De humani corporis fabrica*’s prefatory letter to Charles V: “even though it is just now known to us from the reborn art of dissection, from the careful reading of Galen’s books, and from the welcome restoration of many portions thereof, that he himself never dissected a human body, but in fact was deceived by his monkeys (granted a couple of dried-up human cadavers came his way) and often wrongly disputed ancient doctors who had trained themselves in human dissections.” See Andreas Vesalius, *The Fabric of the Human Body: An Annotated Translation of the 1543 and 1555 Editions of “De Humani Corporis Fabrica Libri Septem,”* trans. D.H. Garrison and M.H. Hast (Basel, Switzerland: Karger), 2014, 3v.

⁶³ Nancy Selleck, “Donne’s Body,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 41, no. 1 (2001): 157, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1556233>. See also Michael Carl Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 14; Elaine Scarry, “Donne: ‘But yet the body is his booke’,” in *Literature and the Body: Essays on Populations and Persons*, ed. Elaine Scarry (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 70-105; Blaine Greteman, “‘All this seed pearl’: John Donne and Bodily Presence,” *College Literature* 37, no. 3 (2010): 26-42, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20749601>.

narrowing early moderns' search to know oneself.

It is also possible that Vesalius' text became so popular because it confirmed an *a priori* assumption that earthly selfhood was embodied in one kind of physical body.⁶⁴

Vesalius' work complemented the work of philosophers and theologians, like St. Augustine, Pico della Mirandola, Marsilio Ficino, and Michel de Montaigne, who all contemplated the soul half of selfhood while taking for granted its fleshy form—its matter and shape.⁶⁵ To the extent that these luminaries thought about the body, it was usually not to clarify its composition, but rather to reflect on how this temporary vehicle hosts, and perhaps even corrupts, the divine and immortal soul.⁶⁶

While a priest and highly concerned about the state of the soul, John Donne bridges the gap between Vesalius and these philosophers and theologians. In fact, Ramie Targoff's description of Donne as a qualified dualist explains his dedication to thinking about both soul and body equally. Donne was a dualist who "rejected the hierarchy of the soul over the body, a dualist who longed above all for the union, not the separation of his

⁶⁴ See Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995), esp. 1-15.

⁶⁵ For a history of self and self-consciousness from antiquity through Descartes, see Robert Ellrodt, "The Slow Emergence of Self-Consciousness," in *Seven Metaphysical Poets: A Structural Study of the Unchanging Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 293-319.

Interestingly, while Vesalius focused on distinguishing the human body from animal bodies, the same theologians and philosophers who worried about separating and hierarchizing man's body and soul contemplated that man could occupy many kinds of bodies. See, for example, Pico della Mirandola, who avers that God plants the seeds of every life form in man, so man could become a plant, a beast, a heavenly being, an angel. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, trans. A. Robert Caponigri (Washington, DC: Regenery Publishing, Inc., 1956), 8.

⁶⁶ St. Augustine insists, "it is not the body as such, but the corruptible body, that is a burden to the soul." See St. Augustine, *City of God*, ed. G.R. Evans and trans. Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), VIII.16.525. For Ficino, the body is the passive instrument for the soul's workings: "Everything that a man is said to do his soul does itself; the body merely suffers it to be done; wherefore man is soul alone, and the body of man must be its instrument." Marsilio Ficino, *Marsilio Ficino's Commentary of Plato's Symposium*, trans. Sears Reynolds Jayne (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1944), 157.

See also Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*, 16-17, 20-22.

two parts.”⁶⁷ One way Donne showcases his serious fascination with the physicality of the body is by discussing it in a somewhat surprising genre: his sermons. In one from 1619, delivered to the Prince and Princess Palatine, he insists: “In the constitution and making of a natural man, the body is not the man, nor the soul is not the man, but the union of these two makes up the man.”⁶⁸ In a second sermon on Easter day, 1623, he affirms, “All that the soule does, it does in, and with, and by the body.”⁶⁹ But it is in another sermon from April 1620/1 sermon at Whitehall, attended by King James I, where Donne registers his interest in exploring the composition and conditions of the body by offering a strikingly anatomical description of the body and its functions while reflecting on Proverbs 25:16, “Hast thou found honey? Eat so much as is sufficient for thee.”

We know the receipt, the capacity of the Ventricle, the stomach of man, how much it can hold; and wee know the receipt of all the receptacles of blood, how much blood the body can have; so wee doe of all the other conduits and cisterns of the body.⁷⁰

Immediately following these confident and clinical assertions about what we know certainly, Donne adopts a more poetical attitude through which he insinuates a vastness his earlier descriptions did not suggest.

When I looke into the larders, and cellars, and vaults, into the vessels of our body for drink, for blood, for urine, they are pottles,⁷¹ and gallons; when I look into the furnaces of our spirits, the ventricles of the heart and of the braine, they are not thimbles...for temporall things, the things of this world, we have no bounds.⁷²

⁶⁷ Ramie Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 22.

⁶⁸ John Donne, *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 261.

⁶⁹ Donne, *Sermons*, 4.358.

⁷⁰ Donne, *Sermons*, 3.235-6.

⁷¹ Approximately half a gallon. “pottle, n.1,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, September 2020, <https://www.oed-com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/Entry/148937?rskey=1YGeCu&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed November 30, 2020).

⁷² Donne, *Sermons*, 3.236. See Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*, 19 where he reads these lines as evidence that as discussions of the body became more interested in interiority, there was a shift in registers from sophisticated to low-brow, classical to grotesque.

Figuring the body as full of larders, cellars, and vaults—things far too large for a human body to contain—not to mention the litotes describing the brain and heart as “not thimbles” reveals both an uncertainty about the body’s capacities and contours, of which he was just so recently sure, and a kind of playfulness and openness to re-imagining and re-forming these organs. Through figurative language, figuring these human parts as distinctly nonhuman, Donne expresses curiosity about the body’s composition: a sense that what counts as a human body may exceed its known organs, bones, and features.

As this glimpse of Donne’s poetical thinking suggests, Donne the poet is more than curious. In this chapter, I explore how, in Donne’s poetry, pondering the composition of the body becomes an opportunity for theorizing the relationship between body and soul and the shared ontologies of human and nonhuman. Doing so, Donne again intervenes in and bridges two conversations. The first is a theological and philosophical one, dominated in his time by Platonic and Neoplatonic certainty that the body and soul were ontologically separate, but partners—not functionally separate or even immune to one another’s influence.⁷³ In both Donne’s religious writing and poetry the body and soul are much less separable. In a 1623 sermon, he preaches, “All that the soule does, it does in, and with, and by the body.”⁷⁴ Here, the soul is an indispensable enabler, but in his sixth paradox, among his earliest writings and from the 1590s, he writes agitatedly:

I say agayne that the body makes the mind. Not that it created it a mind, but formes it a good or bad mind. And this mind may be confounded with Soule, without any violence or injustice to Reason or philosophy, then our Soule (me seemes) is enabled by our body, not this by that.⁷⁵

⁷³ See, for example, Plotinus, who insists that the body and soul are not strangers and that the body “adapts” to the soul and in order to receive the soul. Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. A.H. Armstrong, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), esp. 317 and 319.

⁷⁴ Donne, *Sermons*, 4.358.

⁷⁵ John Donne, *Paradoxes and Problems*, ed. Helen Peters (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 11.

In the paradox, the body is a maker or shaper, as well as an enabler. Adding to the body's powers, Terry Sherwood avers that, as the soul's "primary physical datum," the body for Donne is also "a means to understand not only physical creation, but the soul itself."⁷⁶ Sensitive to these—and more—ways Donne articulates the relationship between the soul and body, Michael Schoenfeldt admits that Donne does not have a "consistent vision of the soul-body relationship, but rather a consistently rigorous investigation of the ontological and lyric possibilities of their various models of contiguity."⁷⁷ Donne's work on the theological and philosophical question about the relationship between the soul and body is remarkable because he doesn't distinguish himself from the predominating Neoplatonic tradition by paying less attention to the soul and more attention to the body, but he constantly ponders their fit—how the human body channels the soul, and, on several occasions, nonhuman bodies' assistance in channeling the soul. As we saw above in Donne's sermons, re-figuring the body's contours and capacities helps him understand the relationship between body and soul. But Donne's poetry takes a further step: a serious exploration of the variety of forms—human and nonhuman—the soul corals and sometimes physically unites in order to understand the soul and convey its multi-faceted glory. Donne portrays the soul seeking and making variety in its search for its fittest forms.

This search brings together human and the nonhuman in a way that theorizes their shared ontology, disrupting the boundary between them and disordering these two

⁷⁶ Terry Grey Sherwood, *Fulfilling the Circle: A Study of John Donne's Thought* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 64.

⁷⁷ Michael Schoenfeldt, "Thinking Through the Body: Corporeality and Interiority in Donne," in *La poésie métaphysique de John Donne*, ed. Claudine Raynaud (Tours: Presses universitaires François-Rabelais, 2002), paragraph 2. doi:10.4000/books.pufr.4546.

categories. The second question Donne's work addresses, then, is: What constitutes the "human" body? Just as Donne tries on different theories about the ontology of the soul—metempsychosis, mortalism (the idea that the soul died with the body and then was resurrected with it), a vitalist-inspired tripartite soul, infusion and traducianism (the idea that the soul was formed inside the body and was an offspring of our parents' souls)—he continually generates new ideas about what constitutes the body and what kind of body is a suitable partner for the soul.⁷⁸ Thus, while it may be true that for Donne the philosopher-priest, there is "no single idea more important to his metaphysics" than that each soul belongs to an "individual" body, this may not have been Donne the poet's metaphysical position.⁷⁹ In his poetry, he continually re-fashions the human body, showcasing how human selfhood can be distributed: "the body literally re-made, its edges re-worked and its organs exposed, thrown into new phenomenologies of time, space, and sense."⁸⁰

In this chapter, I monitor how Donne constantly remakes the form—the shape and matter—that is fittest for the soul. In some poems, he combines features of nonhuman entities with features of the human's organic body, locating the human soul's characteristics—things like goodness, love and loveliness, and beauty—in materially heterogeneous bodies. In other poems, the soul works in and through multiple and various bodies, giving the sense of humanity as distributed—not just into other bodies but

⁷⁸ See Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul*, 8-11.

⁷⁹ Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul*, 8. Her evidence is a quote from Donne to Goodyer: "It is not perfectly true which a very subtil, yet ver deep wit Averroes says, that all mankind hath but one soul, which informes and rules us all, as one Intelligence doth the firmament and all the Starres in it; as though a particulare body were too little an organ for a soul to play in." See John Donne, *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour*, ed. Charles E. Merrill Jr. (New York: Sturgis & Walton, 1910), 43.

⁸⁰ Stokes, Christopher, "'We Prove Mysterious by This Love': John Donne and the Intimacy of Flesh," in *The Return of Theory in Early Modern English Studies*, ed. Paul Cefalu, Gary Kuchar, and Bryan Reynolds, vol. 2 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 229.

also into far-away times and spaces or even materially, physically omnipresent. In both of these paradigms, his poetry rebukes, on the one hand, the myopia that saw “the human” as a combination of soul and a particular organic body and, on the other hand, humoral theory for not going far enough. While humoralism forwarded the idea that body and environment interpenetrate one another such that “selfhood...is never securely bounded,” Donne tests where selfhood can lie, in what kinds of bodies, by reforming the body or locating humanity in multiple and various bodies. In rethinking the material contours of the human body and recognizing that humanity exceeds the typical and singular body in which early moderns located it, Donne works on a larger concern about how what it means to be human is constantly ontologically and materially in flux.

All four poems I read in this chapter contemplate and then craft more perfect forms to channel the soul’s virtues and powers. Two of the poems I read, “Air and Angels” (c.1602) and “The Extasie” (c.1602), showcase Donne’s poetry “enac[ting] material changes in signification.”⁸¹ Donne does not merely disguise the human as nonhuman, but he makes and thinks the human body anew. In the other two poems, a verse epistle to the Countess of Bedford, “Madam, you have refin’d me” (c. 1610), and *The First Anniversary* (1611), Donne imagines human selfhood as distributed across human and nonhuman bodies. In all of these poems, Donne employs metaphor, metonymy and the infamous metaphysical conceit to create new and various forms for the soul to work through and to unite the ontologies of human and nonhuman.⁸² In using

⁸¹ Rayna Kalas, *Frame, Glass, Verse: The Technology of Poetic Invention in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), xvi.

⁸² See Wendy Beth Hyman, “Physics, Metaphysics, and Religion in Lyric Poetry,” in *A Companion to British Literature*, ed. Robert DeMaria, Heesok Chang, and Samantha Zacher, vol. 2: Early Modern Literature 1450-1600 (Malden: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2014), 197-212, esp. 202 and 205.

these tropes to unite ontologies—effectively disordering or rearranging “human” and “nonhuman” as categories—he treats these tropes as no classical or early modern rhetorician before him treated them. He does not use these tropes to make human and nonhuman *resemble* one another or to *transfer* characteristics from one to the other. Rather, in these poems, he uses these tropes to invent new forms of the human body and to bring together the ontologies of seemingly unrelated entities. Thus, the other part of my argument about Donne’s poetic language is that he remodels the materiality of the human right alongside the poetics he uses to illustrate these material changes.

Donne: A “Transformer of every Thing”

While language’s ability to manifest—to, in more familiar words, represent, counterfeit, or figure forth a fore-conceit⁸³--was central to early modern theories of poesy, the idea that rhetorical tropes, especially metaphor, *make* something, change something’s matter,⁸⁴ is missing from classical and early modern definitions. Rather, early modern literary critics and authors, following in the footsteps of their predecessors, treated metaphor as imaging transference, likeness, and difference.⁸⁵ These are the foundational principles of metaphor from Aristotle’s *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*: “in using metaphors to give names to nameless things, we must draw them not from remote but from kindred and similar things, so that the kinship is clearly perceived as soon as the

⁸³ Sidney, *Defence*, 9-10.

⁸⁴ Kalas, *Frame, Glass, Verse*, xi.

⁸⁵ Kalas shows how rhetoricians, such as Puttenham and Sidney, used metaphors, like the poet as painter, carver, carpenter, or gardener, to signal that poetry enacts material change, but this says nothing about the capability of metaphor itself to enact material change (*Frame, Glass, Verse*, 138-142). It is one thing to metaphorize poetry as carpentry and another to explicate the work by which a metaphor turns poetry into carpentry.

words are said”⁸⁶; metaphors are drawn from things that are related so that the “mind will perceive resemblances even in things far apart”⁸⁷; metaphors are composed of antithesis, balance and the “idea of activity”⁸⁸; “Metaphor is a “transference,” consisting in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else”⁸⁹; “a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars.”⁹⁰ Aristotle does not associate making with metaphor: *poiein*, from the Greek *poieites*, “to make,”⁹¹ from which Sidney derives “poet” and “poesy,” does not occur around or as part of Aristotle’s discussions of metaphor in *Rhetoric* or *Poetics*. Like Aristotle, another revered source for early moderns, Quintilian, makes transference the crux of his definition, asserting that the Greek “metaphor” is equivalent to the Latin *translatio*.⁹² He also defines metonymy rudimentarily as, “the substitution of one name for another,” specifically substituting the name of the inventor or possessor with the invention or possession.⁹³

Most early modern definitions of metonymy and metaphor update the classical definitions with little change.⁹⁴ Puttenham has no love lost for metonymy, which is “tak[ing] the name of the author for the thing itself, or the thing containing for that which is contained, and in many other cases do, as it were, wrong name the person or the thing,

⁸⁶ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts and ed. Jonathan Barnes, vol. 1 and 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1405^a35.

⁸⁷ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1412^a10.

⁸⁸ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1412^b30.

⁸⁹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, trans. I. Bywater and ed. Jonathan, 1457^b5.

⁹⁰ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1459^a5.

⁹¹ In Greek: ποιέω, ποιητήν (poet, maker), ποιεῖν (to make)

⁹² Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, vol. 3, 8.6.4

⁹³ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, vol. 3, 8.6.23.

⁹⁴ In addition to Puttenham’s *The Art of English Poesy*, see Robert Carew, *The Excellency of the English Tongue* (London, 1595-6); Richard Sherry, *A Treatise of Schemes and Tropes* (London, 1550); Thomas Wilson, *The Arte of Rhetorique* (London, 1560); Abraham Fraunce, *The Arcadian Rhetoric* (London, 1588); Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence*; Angel Day, *The English Secretary* (London, 1586). Translation and substitution are key for their definitions of metaphor and metonymy, respectively, as well.

so, nevertheless, as it may be understood.”⁹⁵ Additionally for him, as for Aristotle and Quintilian, metaphor is the “*figure of transport*. There is a kind of wresting of a single word from his own right signification to another not so natural, but yet of some affinity or conveniency with it.”⁹⁶ Though Puttenham carries over the ideas of translation, transference, and likeness almost undisturbed from the classical definitions, he specifies and intensifies the kind of “activity” that Aristotle says metaphor ideates. For Puttenham, metaphor is a turning and twisting that violates natural law. Though Puttenham’s definition clarifies the physicality of metaphor, it still says nothing about metaphor changing matter. Robert Carew likewise attends to the physicality of metaphor, but his definition gets closer to a sense of metaphor enacting material change. Metaphors do not simply convey an idea, but they *do* something; they make something (happen): “our speech doth not consist only of wordes, but in a sorte euen of deedes, as when wee expresse a matter by Metaphors, wherein the English is very frutefull and forcible.”⁹⁷ Expressing a matter by metaphor is a deed that produces fruit.

Critics, such as Maria Franziska Fahey, have tied the conception of metaphor as a fruitful activity to twentieth-century ideas of performative language or speech acts, which change one’s world.⁹⁸ Traditionally, such a connection prefaces a discussion of early modern drama, as it does in Fahey’s book, but speech acts also occur—but are rarely recognized—in non-dramatic writing as well. Their occurrence bolsters a theory that poetry and poetic devices effect material change. In Carew’s distinction between words

⁹⁵ Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, 265-6.

⁹⁶ Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, 263.

⁹⁷ Robert Carew, *The Excellency of the English Tongue*, in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904), 288.

⁹⁸ Maria Franziska Fahey, *Metaphor and Shakespearean Drama: Unchaste Signification* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 19. See also J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. J.O. Urmson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

and deeds we see evidence for Rayna Kalas' claim that early moderns saw language as "an instrument of figuration that partakes of worldly reality rather than as an artifact or representation."⁹⁹ Though Carew does not evidently equate deeds with change in matter, we can at least see that he is thinking about language's ability to affect the conditions of reality.

Though, As Puttenham's worry about metonymy wrongly naming something intimates, early modern writers sometimes expressed concern about the ways particular devices reshaped reality. While one of those maligned devices, "metaphysical conceit," does not appear in any pre-eighteenth-century rhetorical handbook, as early as the 1620s, Donne was accused of indecorously engaging with metaphysics in his poetry. Even more, according to Samuel Johnson, the term's coiner, "metaphysical conceit" described a corruption of metaphor, first corrupted by a crew of seventeenth-century poets, led by Donne. Johnson's, William Drummond's, and John Dryden's disparaging assessments of metaphysical poetry and its hallmark trope reveal that it is highly indecorous, in part, because it does not respect the boundaries between the two entities in a metaphorical relationship. There is something perverse about the way Donne and his colleagues transfer characteristics and alight on similarities and differences. Johnson delivers the most infamous critique of metaphysical poetry and its conceits when he denigrates metaphysical poets' figures as

discordia concors; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike... The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions[.]¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Kalas, *Frame, Glass, Verse*, 1.

¹⁰⁰ Samuel Johnson, "Cowley," in *The Lives of the English Poets: and a Criticism on Their Works*, vol. 1 (Dublin, 1780-1), 20-1.

This definition synthesizes several complaints about how some devices can abuse language: metaphysical conceit's supposedly "occult resemblances" and forced comparisons convey Johnson's sense of the device as corrupted metaphor, while the image of violently yoking together heterogeneous ideas recalls the force in "wresting," turning and twisting words from their right signification to an unnatural one in Puttenham's definition of metonymy.¹⁰¹ The procedures Johnson describes—combining dissimilar things, violently yoking together heterogeneous ideas—make metaphysical poets unfit for the title of "poets"; instead, Drummond declares, they deserve the name, "Transformers of every Thing"¹⁰²—for that is what they do. Metaphysical poets' figurations do not neatly translate, put one thing in place of another, but they transform, *change* one thing into another. Clearly etymologically related to "disorder," *discordia concors* indeed carries the same intention of producing varieties by disassembling, rearranging, and even trying to effect ontological change, change at the level of essence, by "yoking" heterogeneous things together.¹⁰³

Thus, style is only one part of the complaint about metaphysical poets. The fact that *discordia concors* acted almost like philosophy is what offends these early critics most. According to Ben Jonson's report of a conversation with Donne, Donne seems to have incriminated himself as using poetry to think philosophically about worldly

¹⁰¹ See Katrin Ettenhuber, "'Comparisons Are Odious?': Revisiting the Metaphysical Conceit in Donne," *The Review of English Studies* 62, no. 255 (2011): 393-411, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23016434>, for a thorough contextualization of metaphysical conceit among its companion tropes, especially metaphor and catachresis (400); J.W. van Hook, "'Concupiscence of Witt': The Metaphysical Conceit in Baroque Poetics," *Modern Philology* 84, no. 1 (1986): 24-38, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/436959>; Rosamund Tuve, *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1947); and James Smith, "On Metaphysical Poetry" *Scrutiny* 2, no. 3 (1933): 222-39 where he explicitly defines metaphysical conceit as "metaphor, whose two elements are thought and extension" (233).

¹⁰² William Drummond, "To his much honored friend Dr. Arthur Johnston, physician to the King," in *The Works of William Drummond, of Hawthornden. Consisting of Those which were formerly Printed and Those which were design'd for the Press* (London, 1711), 143.

¹⁰³ See "dis-, prefix," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

conditions and concepts. In *Conversations with Drummond* (1619), Jonson tells Drummond that he told Donne that if the *Anniversaries* had “been written of the Virgin Mary it [would] have been something.” Donne, according to Jonson, responds that “he described the idea of a woman, and not as she was.”¹⁰⁴ Donne’s admission that he describes an “*idea* of a woman” causes Drummond, the coiner of “Transformers of every Thing,” to rebuke Donne’s poetry: Donne “endeavoured to abstract [poetry] to *Metaphysical Idea*’s, and *Scholastical Quiddities*, denuding her of her own Habits, and those Ornaments with which she hath amused the World some Thousand Years.”¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, by the late-seventeenth century, Donne was overtly being associated with metaphysical philosophers: Izaak Walton, Donne’s first biographer, recorded “censures” by Donne’s contemporaries comparing him to Pico della Mirandola and St. Augustine.¹⁰⁶ This evidence from Donne and his critics confirms not just a feeling that Donne was interested in exploring the essence of being(s), but his intention to do so. As a metaphysical poet, Donne takes his philosophical meditations on concepts or ideas and uses them to make something anew. Indeed, Drummond tells us exactly where we should look for metaphysical thinking: in poetry’s tropes, its habits and ornaments.

Metaphor’s Creative Power

Contemporary assessments of figurative language and specific tropes help

¹⁰⁴ Ben Jonson, “Appendix 2: Conversations with Drummond,” in *Ben Jonson: The Complete Poems*, ed. George Parfitt (New York: Penguin, 1975), 462.

¹⁰⁵ Drummond, “To his much honored friend,” 143, original emphasis.

¹⁰⁶ Izaak Walton, *The Lives of Dr. John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Mr. Richard Hooker, Mr. George Herbert* (London, 1670), 13 and 37.

elucidate how Donne's thinking and making anew result in the kind of ontological entanglement I argue we see in his poetry. Specifically, late-twentieth century literary critics recognized that metaphor and simile work by actually locating and highlighting essences that tenor and vehicle share. Metaphor or simile do not indicate likeness, but rather they point to a shared characteristic of being. In *Language Recreated: Seventeenth-Century Metaphorists and the Act of Metaphor* (1992), Harold Skulsky begins his passage to this thesis by first showing that figurative and literal meanings are not diametrically opposed. Rather, Skulsky argues, a statement becomes figurative from its context: an intended figurative meaning is "dug" out of the literal meaning.¹⁰⁷ Skulsky offers the example of the murders' response to Macbeth when he asks them if they like Banquo. "We are men, my Liege," they respond.¹⁰⁸ Skulsky argues that the utterance is "pointlessly true"; the murderers are men. But the significance is revealed by allowing the literal meaning to "yield to another one related to it in some familiar way, maybe by a loose kind of implication."¹⁰⁹ In Henry Peacham's sixteenth-century vernacular, that is, "not proper, but yet nye, and likely."¹¹⁰ In this context, "men" is meant to be taken figuratively—not as a statement of biological fact, but as an indication that subjection under the heel of a sovereign has bred a contempt vicious enough that the men are willing to perform an apparently characteristic duty of men, to murder. In other words, the loose implication is that men want to kill the things they hate. The proper, that is figurative, meaning of "men" here can only be derived from context.

¹⁰⁷ Harold Skulsky, *Language Recreated: Seventeenth-Century Metaphorists and the Act of Metaphor* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 10-11.

¹⁰⁸ William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 3.1.92

¹⁰⁹ Skulsky, *Language Recreated*, 9.

¹¹⁰ Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence*, 6.

Like figurative meaning, which Skulsky shows does not simply indicate likeness but rather highlights certain literal and essential characteristics, metaphor “demands an effort at learning (uptake) that comparison spares us.”¹¹¹ That effort is learning what characteristics constitute each thing. Simile, too, a kind of metaphor, is more than comparison; in fact, “a simile isn’t a comparison after all.”¹¹² Skulsky’s example for such a counter-intuitive statement comes from a surprising source: Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*.¹¹³ In order to understand such a series of strange claims, we need to know more from Skulsky’s theory of figurative and literal meanings. With Aristotle’s analysis of a simile from *The Iliad* in mind, “‘He leapt on the foe as a lion,’” Skulsky breaks down the steps of how simile makes meaning.¹¹⁴ First he explains an example of a literal meaning: “‘King Louis is a lion’” is a statement with a literal meaning, if there was a lion named, “King Louis.” Such a statement “yields its figurative sense,” however, when coupled with the proposition, “‘If something is a lion it’s bold.’”¹¹⁵ Once we have this detail in our minds, “King Louis is a lion,” is a statement that indicates the king’s boldness, a meaning we had to “dig out,” aided by its coincidence with the description that lions are bold. Notice, however, that in order to arrive at the figurative meaning we did not need to compare King Louis’ and the lion’s behaviors; we simply had to recognize a trait they share. Achilles and lions sharing a particular trait also enables Aristotle to arrive at his reading of, “He leapt on the foes as a lion.” Out of context, this bit of description from *The Iliad* tells us that someone (Achilles) pounced on his foe in a way a lion would

¹¹¹ Skulsky, *Language Recreated*, 22.

¹¹² Skulsky, *Language Recreated*, 23.

¹¹³ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1406^b20-26.

¹¹⁴ Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. A.T. Murray (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924), 20.164 qtd. in Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1406^b20.

¹¹⁵ Skulsky, *Language Recreated*, 23.

pounce, but we are unsure what quality (of Achilles and of a lion) this statement is trying to convey—what do Achilles and a lion have in common that would make his pounce look like a lion’s? In order to access the figurative meaning, what behavior Achilles exhibits and likewise shares with the lion, we need to know the context in which this claim is made. In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle, having read the episode, decides this statement portrays Achilles’s courage.¹¹⁶ The figurative meaning of the statement, then, does not require comparing Achilles and lions. It only requires observing that they share some trait in common, that they are variations of one another.

Skulsky’s second, more schematic, explanation further demonstrates that metaphor and simile bring unrelated ontologies together rather than simply comparing unlike entities.¹¹⁷

When you warn somebody not to tangle with Bill because Bill is like a dragon, you’re not saying that Bill and dragons share some unspecified trait. You’re specifying the trait. For some behavioral trait *T* that will scare your listener, you’re saying that Bill has *T*. ‘Being like a dragon’ means (figuratively) just *having T*—say, *being fierce*. And it doesn’t mean being as fierce as a dragon, either... The illusion of reference to dragons or to dragon standards of fierceness is created by taking the phrase literally—by misreading.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1406^b24.

¹¹⁷ Compare Skulsky’s theory to those of more renowned literary theorists and linguists, Max Black and Paul Ricoeur. Though he presents three separate views of metaphor—metaphor as comparison, substitution or interaction—all three of Max Black’s views are versions of *translatio*, which assumes and maintains ontological separation between two things. Black’s explanations of the comparison and substitution views clearly portray metaphor as conveying likeness and difference. The “interaction view” sees metaphor as applying the characteristics of one term in the metaphor to the other. For example, the interaction view of “Man is a wolf” would take the “associated commonplaces” of wolf, the characteristics of being a wolf, and apply them to man in order to renovate the idea of man. Max Black, “Metaphor,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 55 (1954): 291, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4544549>.

Paul Ricoeur’s concise analysis that “tropes are indeed events” that create new meaning recalls early moderns’ view that literary devices *do* something in and to reality, but it doesn’t go so far as to classify the action as ontological making (as opposed to meaning). See Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny, Kathleen McLaughlin, and John Costello, SJ (New York: Routledge, 1975), 55).

See also Willard Bohn, “Roman Jakobson’s Theory of Metaphor and Metonymy: An Annotated Bibliography,” *Style* 18 (1984): 534-50, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42945521>.

¹¹⁸ Skulsky, *Language Recreated*, 23, original emphasis.

Skulsky corrects the traditional thinking that the “like” or “as” of a simile signals merely resemblance—likeness despite difference—between the two compared entities. In this kind of erroneous reading, when we read “Bill is like a dragon,” we translate the dragon’s actions into what Bill, a human, could express in his Bill-way. We admit that Bill and the dragon might both be fierce, but we maintain that they do not share ontologies because they express fierceness in distinct ways. Skulsky insists that we misread the simile and miss its figurative meaning if we acknowledge this difference. For the figurative meaning, resemblance doesn’t come into play: “‘Being like a dragon’ means (figuratively) just *having T*—say, *being fierce*. And it doesn’t mean being as fierce as a dragon.” It is improper to treat the statement as *comparing* Bill’s and the dragon’s expressions or level of fierceness (this is an “illusion”). Rather a simile tells us that they “share” the quality of fierceness; they both have *T*. Skulsky’s assessment of figurative language takes translation—in the sense of taking one set of ideas and applying it to something else—out of the equation. The simile’s properly figurative meaning does not translate the human expression into a dragon one, or vice versa, or measure the human against the dragon-standard of fierceness. Instead, Skulsky shows that figuration through metaphor and related devices can reveal unexpected truths about ontological sameness between entities. Therefore, these devices can, for example, expand being human, human being, to include beings with which the human *shares* characteristics.

The only aspect missing from Skulsky’s study is how this theory of figurative language interacts with a metaphysics. That is, Skulsky does not, as I aim to do, develop a theory of how language works in relation to a particular metaphysical concern, like the relationship between body and soul and the relationship between human and nonhuman.

On the other extreme, post-structuralists, like Raymond Williams and Judith Butler, have attended to how language alters relationships in the matrix of real-world political and economic concerns.¹¹⁹ This they call language's material power and, therefore, study language as a "distinctive material process."¹²⁰ However, often the political results of such work—for example, how language predisposes us to see and talk about the body—can eclipse evaluating the poetics of this work, its process: *how* metaphor, for example, re-makes the body, instead of merely ornamentalizing a description of it by substituting other terms for familiar features.¹²¹ Reading Donne's poetry, I intend to bridge these approaches by attending to how Donne uses literary devices in a process of re-thinking the ontological relationships between human and nonhuman favored by his contemporaries.

In other words, I am interested in the way content draws attention to its own production.¹²² Derek Attridge illustrates this idea with the famous example from the opening of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955): "Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the

¹¹⁹ Over the last fifty years, treating language as material has meant recognizing language's value and role in social, cultural, political, and economic structures of power. See Shalini Shankar and Jillian R. Cavanaugh, "Toward a Theory of Language Materiality: An Introduction," in *Language and Materiality: Ethnographic and Theoretical Explorations*, ed. Shalini Shankar and Jillian R. Cavanaugh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 1-28, esp. 1.

For an overview of post-structuralism's attention to language, see Johannes Beetz, "The Materiality of Language and the Decentered Subject," in *Materiality and Subject in Marxism, (Post-) Structuralism, and Material Semiotics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 73-107. See also Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), especially chapter two, "The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary," 28-57.

¹²⁰ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 38.

¹²¹ See Butler, *Bodies That Matter* or N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999). Both studies include discussions of bodies in fiction, but both also privilege the real-world political value of the kinds of bodies fiction produces rather than a more literary close-reading of the operations of figuration, how specific figurative devices produce those bodies.

¹²² See Elaine Scarry, "Donne: 'But yet the body is his booke'": One of the ways Donne draws attention to the materiality of his poetry is by addressing the "sensuous properties" of the page (75).

palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta.”¹²³ The dismemberment of the name, “Lolita,” and relaying of the experience of saying the name, the drawing attention to the parts of her name and how syllables and vocalization work together to produce this name and subject, exemplify what I mean by content drawing attention to production and exemplify the powerful way language can subtly suggest aspects of form or character. From this introduction, we associate “Lolita”/Dolores with painstaking attention to composition and analysis, which is appropriate given the novel’s other kinds of wordplay. While early modern writers were not quite as experimental as Nabokov, Herbert’s shaped poems certainly evince interest in the relationship between content and the poetic strategies that produce it.¹²⁴ I argue that we find commensurate poetic creativity in Donne’s poetry, as the new human forms emerge from metaphor, metonymy, and metaphysical conceit *making* a fitter form for the soul—disassembling and recomposing forms—rather than simply likening previously dissimilar forms.

Making instead of likening is what separates Donne’s poetry from how early moderns typically used figurative language to characterize or modify the human body. After Vesalius, throughout the sixteenth and, especially, first half of the seventeenth centuries, anatomical manuals flooded the information market.¹²⁵ Consistently, these

¹²³ See Derek Attridge, “The Language of Poetry: Materiality and Meaning,” *Essays in Criticism* 31, no. 3 (1981): 228-245, esp. 234, <https://doi.org/10.1093/eic/XXXI.3.228>.

¹²⁴ On the materiality of shaped poems, in addition to Kalas, see Charles A. Huttar, “Herbert and the Emblematic Tradition,” in *Like Season’d Timber: New Essays on George Herbert*, ed. Edmund Miller and Robert DiYanni (New York: Peter Lang, Inc., 1987), 59-100; Elizabeth Cook, *Seeing through Words: The Scope of Late Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), especially “Figured Poetry” and “George Herbert”; Random Cloud, “Enter Reader,” in *The Editorial Gaze: Mediating Texts in Literature and the Arts*, ed. Paul Eggert and Margaret Sankey (New York: Routledge 1998), 3-50 is eccentric but nevertheless creative and generative on the materiality of Herbert’s poetry.

¹²⁵ See Mary E. Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

manuals turn to metaphor and simile to try to understand and explain bodily processes.¹²⁶

Margaret Healy has argued that metaphors of the body preceded empirical knowledge about the body, which accounts for their lingering in early modern anatomical and medical manuals.¹²⁷ Even more insidiously, “[s]imiles in both medical and religious tracts began...increasingly to elide into metaphors, and metaphors into hypotheses.”¹²⁸

There were recurring images of the body as a castle, ship, city, or temple, threatened constantly by enemy incursions,¹²⁹ or take an example from Robert Burton’s famous *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) in which he explains stomach irritation: “As a Lampe is choaked with a multitude of oyle, or a little fire with overmuch wood quite extinguished: so is the natural heat with immoderate eating strangled in the body.”¹³⁰ In an unsettling image, Sir Thomas Browne announces in his *Religio Medici* (1642), “‘All flesh is grass’ is not only metaphorically, but literally true, for all those creatures we behold are but the

¹²⁶ The reverse also happened, especially picking up from the mid-seventeenth century onward, when philosophers and “philosophers” such as Thomas Robinson—country parson and, in his spare time, collector of minerals and other earth novelties—who wrote an entire geological and natural history of the earth, *The Anatomy of the Earth* (1694) and, of course, Thomas Hobbes in his *Leviathan* (1651), likened the structure and function of non-organic bodies to human ones. Donne himself, in 1622, characterized the Virginia Company as, “not onely a *Spleene*, to draine the ill humours of the body, but a *Liver*, to breed good blood.” (Donne, *Sermons*, 4.272). See essays in Matthew Landers and Brian Muñoz, eds., *Anatomy and the Organization of Knowledge, 1500-1850* (New York: Routledge, 2012), esp. Matthew Landers, “Early Modern Dissection as a Physical Model of Organization,” 9-24, on how sixteenth- and seventeenth-century anatomical manuals, such as Helkiah Crooke’s *Mikrooksmographia, a Description of the Body of Man* (1615) and Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) modeled their organization after the systemic relation of parts in the body.

¹²⁷ Margaret Healy, *Fictions of Disease in Early Modern England: Bodies, Plagues, and Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 17.

¹²⁸ Healy, *Fictions of Disease*, 41. See also Wendy Beth Hyman’s pithier remark, “when one needed to think physiologically in the Renaissance, one often first wanted to think metaphorically.” Wendy Beth Hyman, “‘Deductions from Metaphors’: Figurative Truth, Poetical Language, and Early Modern Science,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Early Modern Literature and Science*, 27-48, esp. 30.

¹²⁹ See Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Castel of Helth* (London, 1534); William Bullein, *Bulleins Bulwarke of defence against all Sicknes, Sornes, and woundes* (London, 1562); and Thomas Cogan, *The Haven of Health* (London, 1584).

¹³⁰ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicolas K. Kiessling, and Rhonda L. Blair, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 221. See also Joshua Sylvester, *The Divine Weeks of Joshua Sylvester: Mainly Translated from the French of William de Saluste, Lord of the Bartas*, ed. Theron Wilber Haight (Waukesha, WI: H.M. Youmans Publisher, 1908) for a characterization of the stomach as “our master cook” (128).

herbs of the field, digested into flesh in them, or more remotely carnified in our selves.”¹³¹ Less gruesomely, plant metaphors were especially common in gynecological manuals. For example, in *A Discourse Touching Generation* (1658) the Dutch physician Levinus Lemnius writes, “For as Plants receive more from fruitful ground, than they do from the Industry of the Husbandman; so the Infant receives all things more plentifully from the Mother.”¹³² Likewise, in the first midwifery manual written by a woman, *The Midwives Book* (1671), Jane Sharp adopts the metaphor of women’s bodies as landscapes that required plowing and likens reproduction and rearing to trees bearing fruit: “If a Nurse be well-complexioned her milk cannot be ill; for a Fig-Tree bears not Thistles: a good Tree will bring forth good Fruit.”¹³³ In these instances, metaphor and simile direct the reader to think of the human *in terms of* an arboreal body or a lamp, a one-to-one correspondence. Because they occur in an explicit context where the author is not trying to theorize the body but rather trying to prove a set of hypotheses or to describe the mechanism that produces the observed characteristics of the body, the metaphors are explanatory. The author accommodates the nonhuman body so that it can illuminate the characteristics of the human body they want to explain.

The figurations in Donne’s poetry to which I turn first, those in “Air and Angels” and “The Exstasie,” work differently: they occur in a context of theorization, where the speaker is trying to resolve frustrations over the limited human-organic form—its inability to contain the resplendent and multi-faceted soul. The speakers of these poems attempt to resolve this frustration by supplementing the human-organic body with

¹³¹ Thomas Browne, *Thomas Browne: Selected Writings*, ed. Claire Preston (New York: Routledge, 2006), 19-20.

¹³² Levinus Lemnius, *A discoruse [sic] touching generation* (London, 1667), 76-7.

¹³³ Jane Sharp, *The midwives book, or, The whole art of midwifry discovered* (London, 1671), 362-3.

nonorganic characteristics and imagining it as taking on nonhuman abilities and attributes. Roman Jakobson argues that this kind of combination is a hallmark of metonymy, which relies on pointing out “contiguity,” not substituting one thing for another (as metaphor does).¹³⁴ However, I argue that Donne’s combination suggests and produces more than contiguity: in combining human and nonhuman forms he is remaking the human form. He continually reimagines a fitter form to accommodate a soul that escapes his full comprehension—one he spends his entire career learning more about, its infinite facets and virtues. To even partially accommodate the soul’s variety, he needs an equally various form: one that exceeds the contours and capabilities of the human body, so he borrows from and conglomerates it with others. He muddles the distinction between human and nonhuman in the search to find the fittest body for the soul.

Making a “fitter form”

Frustration with the human body’s limitations leads to innovation in two of Donne’s most-discussed poems from *Songs and Sonnets* (c. 1598-c.1614), “Air and Angels” and “The Extasie.”¹³⁵ These poems’ interest in the relationships between bodies

¹³⁴ Roman Jakobson, “Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances,” in *On Language*, ed. Linda R. Waugh and Monique Monville-Burstion (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 115-133, esp. 119-120, 129. Jakobson argues that linguistic signification involves four operations: combination, contexture, selection, and substitution. Combination and contexture are companion processes that highlight the importance of context in meaning-making. Selection and substitution are companion processes and acknowledge that every utterance requires choosing between alternatives, which implies the possibility of substituting one word for another. The process of combination and contexture make meaning through contiguity, and so is associated with metonymy, whereas similarity underlies selection and substitution, and so is the operation of metaphor.

¹³⁵ Helen Gardner’s dating of both poems to after 1602 is generally accepted. Affixing exact dates for the fifty-five poems which make up *Songs and Sonnets* is difficult. They were not printed together as a collection until 1635, after Donne died, and they seldom appear in manuscript miscellanies or print before 1633; though, the poems appear in numerous of Donne’s own manuscript copies from at least 1620

and souls indicates Donne's strong investment in two metaphysical questions: How do soul and body work on one another? and What constitutes the human body? Jonathan Sawday's gruesome remark that the sixteenth-century was a "'heroic age' of scientific discovery" because it was "a voracious consumer of the vestiges of the human frame" implies the myopia, characteristic of this post-Galenic age of dissection, to see humanity as contained to just one form or frame.¹³⁶ While "[t]he body was produced...as the flimsy vehicle for a complex ideological structure which stretched into every area of artistic and scientific endeavour in the early-modern period," the age of dissection in which Donne wrote treated the body as a singular nexus for myriad ideological and social concerns. However, this age largely did not—as Donne did—consider how humanity, one's selfhood, might flow through more than just the typical and singular human frame, how exhibiting all of the human soul's varied, complex, and intense proclivities might require conglomerating human and nonhuman.¹³⁷ In both "Air and Angels" and "The Extasie," Donne anatomizes the operations of bodies and souls, individually and as a unit, and addresses the same central problem: the soul has been confined in a human body incapable of representing its virtues and love or allowing the soul to fully express them. Both poems demonstrate and theorize the creation of fitter, more varied, forms for the restless souls.

"Air and Angels" depicts the speaker's journey from entranced by a soul just beginning to take its human shape to disdain for its full physicalization. At first, the

onwards. See John Donne, *John Donne: The Elegies and Songs and Sonnets*, ed. Helen Gardner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), xlvii-lxii, esp. lviii-lxii.

¹³⁶ Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*, 4.

¹³⁷ Schoenfeldt describes the period from roughly 1540-1640 as the period of the "discovery of the Vesalian body as opposed to the later *invention* of the Harveian or Cartesian body." Schoenfeldt, *The Body Emblazoned*, 23, original emphasis.

speaker can only discern the soul's body in fragments and with paradoxes and comparisons. His lover's siren voice is her first recognizable and individuating feature: a voice in an angle-like and "shapeless flame" (3) beckons him, but when he follows it, he sees only "Some lovely glorious nothing" (6).¹³⁸ Twice and thrice loving this paradoxical creature, a shapeless flame and a lovely nothing, the speaker reveals his preference for an impossible, not fully physicalized, creature.¹³⁹ He regrets that his soul, too, "Takes limbs of flesh, and else could nothing do" (8). So "Love must not be, but take a body too" (10). His soul and Love, a metonym for his beloved's soul, follow the typical Platonic movement of a soul assuming or adopting a human body to which it had no prior relation. The impulsiveness and force implied in "taking" a fleshly body suggests little pre-meditation or selection. Nevertheless, the speaker reinforces the permanence of this bond when Love "fix[es]" itself into the lip, eye, and brow of the human female body. The *OED*'s definitions of "fix" not only reiterate the desperation implied in "taking," but they also convey restriction and security in this relationship.¹⁴⁰ Over the course of the stanza, the soul abandons its flickering and paradoxical (and so changeable and unsteady) ideal form to become restrained in, affixed in, one physical form.

"Fixing" and "taking" indicate the soul's formative power over the body it

¹³⁸ John Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, ed. A.J. Smith (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 41. All citations of Donne's poetry from this edition unless otherwise noted.

¹³⁹ I am sidelining the traditionally-assumed pun on "nothing" for the purposes of thinking about the matter of the beloved's body. But I would also argue that we should not automatically assume that the speaker means to foreground here the tropological meaning of "nothing" as "no-thing," meaning a body without a penis, because this stanza crafts the body progressively from "nothing" to the very specific humanly form with lips, eyes, and brows. To be punning on "nothing" before the body has been crafted fully disrupts the otherwise elegant progression of the stanza.

¹⁴⁰ I.1.a: "To...make firm or stable in position"; I.1.f: "To become firmly attached or implanted"; I.2.a: "To secure from change, vacillation or wandering"; I.2.c: "To settle immovably the purpose or conviction"; I.4.a: "To deprive of volatility or fluidity." "fix, v," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, September 2020, <https://www-oed-com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/Entry/70815?rskey=HlaBlZ&result=3&isAdvanced=false> (accessed December 06, 2020).

inhabits. The body in “Air and Angels” does not at first appear to be a willing participant in this relationship as the speaker and Love “take” (8,10) and “assume” (13) their bodies. It’s as if the soul overwhelms and traps the body into submission. But the body is not rendered completely inert, though it is controlled. Fixing implies not just stabilizing, but molding or repairing. Thus, by the end of the first stanza, there is a sense that the soul will attempt to create and mold its captive. The language of fixing and taking imply the poetic mode—the mode of making.

The second stanza bears out the consequences of the frustrated soul’s incursion as the speaker imagines a fitter, more suitable, form for the soul. The stanza begins with an attempt to fit Love into the female form, but as the stanza progresses, it becomes clear that the fitter form would conglomerate aspects of diverse types of entities: the fitter form could materially change depending on what the soul needed. It’s important to note that though this stanza is often read as another iteration of the English sonneteers’ misogyny—that women are essentially corrupt—the beloved’s (and for that matter, the speaker’s) body is gender- and sex-less up until the infamous final lines,

As is ’twixt air and angel’s purity,
 ’Twixt women’s love, and men’s will ever be. (27-8)

For this reason, we should take this stanza as disappointed in a whole species, not just critical of one sex. The central problem is that the human body is ill-equipped to reflect all of Love’s characteristics because it can only take one form. In contrast to the cautious eagerness with which the speaker begins—asking love to find some definition and finally allowing love to inhere in the lips, eyes, and brows of his lover—now, at the beginning of the next stanza, he recognizes the disastrous consequences of securing love in one form:

While thus to ballast love, I thought,

And so more steadily to have gone,
 With wares which would sink admiration,
 I saw, I had love's pinnacle overfraught. (15-18)

The fateful error is to steady and restrict love's body, and the speaker recognizes this mistake as a function of love inhering in the limited human body:

Every thy hair for love to work upon
 Is much too much, some fitter must be sought. (19-20)

For the speaker, either it is "much too much" an imposition to ask glorious love to simply dress or "work upon" the body's hair, or the body's hair simply isn't a suitable form for love. That is, even if love inhered in every hair, the hair would still not be able to express love's radiance—too much of it would still be left over and unexpressed.

While the body the speaker imagines so far reflects the principles of permeability and changeability that early modern humoral theorists believed characterized the human body, in "Air and Angels," and the other poems studied below, the speaker proposes specific changes to the human body to make it fitter.¹⁴¹ In the rest of "Air and Angels," the speaker assesses several alternatives to the one organic human form before he settles on a—quite literally—nebulous and mixed form: a "sphere" mixed of air, planets and firmament. First the speaker affirms that love's body cannot be "nothing" (21) nor a thing "Extreme, and scattr'ing bright" (22). Then, an analogy to an angel with

face and wings
 Of air, not pure as it, yet pure doth wear (23-4)

suggests that the ideal form is elementally adulterated.¹⁴² However, it is not until the

¹⁴¹ On the permeability of the body, see Selleck, "Donne's Body": "[W]ho you are is determined by your physical context as well as by the unstable content of your body, and changes as a result of that involvement with context" (152).

¹⁴² Throughout the *John Donne Journal* Special Issue, "Interpreting 'Aire and Angels,'" 9, no.1 (1990) the implications of this analogy, especially with regard to angelology, gender, and the materiality of the beloved's body, are discussed. See in particular, R.V. Young's "Angels in 'Aire and Angels'" (1-14) and the four responses to it, Stella P. Revard's "The Angelic Messenger in 'Aire and Angels'" (15-18), Phoebe

speaker figures the body as an astronomical sphere—a whole made up of diverse parts, a quintessential soup and the heavenly bodies suspended in it—that we understand the proper physical form to be, in many ways, multiple. It is massive, but contained and a container, and, while shaped, it lacks the kinds of distinct physical features (lips, a nose, hair, and a mouth) that would determine and affix its behavior. The speaker turns to this multiple form out of frustration that the soul needs a more capacious and versatile body than the singular human body can offer.¹⁴³

Perhaps it is uncomfortable to specify the sphere as an astronomical body instead of reading the word as a vaguer, more anodyne metaphor meant to imply the beloved as nurturing, comforting, and protective, like a spherical barrier.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, even the most revered Donne scholars tend to take this approach. For example, A.J. Smith's analysis around these lines begins with a focus on the physical body, but disappointingly escapes into a conclusion about what the "sphere" implies about the lovers' emotional relationship. Smith begins, "the poet's love can still find a body although it can use neither the 'nothings' he has previously loved, nor the too-great beauty of the form in which his mistress...now appears to him." His mention of the poet looking for a proper body looks as if it will materialize into a discussion about the physical properties of love's sphere, especially when he mentions that "the only proper vehicle for his love is

S. Spinrad's, "'Aire and Angels' and Questionable Shapes" (19-22), Michael C. Schoenfeldt's, "Patriarchal Assumptions and Egalitarian Designs" (23-26), and Judith Scherer Herz's "Resisting Mutuality" (27-32).

¹⁴³ Donne does not originate the idea that the human soul needs more than one kind of body. Harold Skulsky reminds us that Homer makes us think repeatedly that "the properties of having a mind and of having a certain sort of body" may not coincide. Harold Skulsky, *Metamorphosis: The Mind in Exile* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 27-8.

¹⁴⁴ If the poem's insistence that "Love must not be, but take a body too" (10) were not enough to convince that the speaker here is keenly interested in the material body, no less than Aristotelian and Thomist doctrines regarding the relationship between body and soul support this theological and metaphysical claim. See Young, "Angels in 'Aire and Angels,'" 7.

her love.” However, Smith offers only a metaphorical reading: that the speaker’s love is not unrequited. As his love’s vehicle, her love returns his love.¹⁴⁵ This is all despite the fact that in his *The Complete English Poems of Donne*, Smith glosses “sphere” as an astronomical body.¹⁴⁶ If we simply read “sphere” for what sentiments it conveys we miss an opportunity for understanding the diverse features of love’s best physical form—a concern that is central to the speaker’s intentions. Additionally, I would argue, diverting to the metaphorical meaning means diverting from seeing the metaphysical work the poem is doing: the fact that it remakes the human body which the soul is forced to inhabit.

And, in fact, Samuel Johnson warns that we should prepare for discomfort when poets broach metaphysical topics through the device that carries the name, the metaphysical conceit, such as, “thy love may be my love’s sphere.”¹⁴⁷ Our discomfort here is apparently generated by the fact that Donne’s metaphysical conceit does not compare the sphere and the organic body. Rather, the poem’s repeated attention to craft in fitting, forming, fixing, and taking insists that we understand the metaphysical conceit as molding the beloved’s house of love into a sphere.¹⁴⁸ This metaphysical conceit exemplifies why the trope is treated as such an “odious” and challenging construction.¹⁴⁹ The body love initially tries to affix itself in is so specifically human, with lips, eyes, hair,

¹⁴⁵ A.J. Smith, “New Bearings in Donne: ‘Air and Angels’,” in *John Donne: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Helen Gardner (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), 176-7.

¹⁴⁶ Donne, *Complete English Poems*, 354n.25. See also Spinrad, “‘Aire and Angels’ and Questionable Shape,” 22.

¹⁴⁷ See William Hazlitt, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P Howe, vol. 6 (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, Ltd, 1931). Metaphysical language is characterized above all by “recondite analogy,” “the remote” (50), and “far-fetched” (49).

¹⁴⁸ This is not to mention the elision that also occurs, where “love”—previously a synecdoche for the beloved’s soul—now stands for the bodily presence of the beloved.

¹⁴⁹ Hazlitt, *Complete Works*, 6.58.

and a brow, but the ideal body the speaker describes has capacities that exceed what an organic human body could perform. Here we have a Donnean example of how figuration works according to Skulsky: we are not meant to compare the beloved's body to a sphere or transfer characteristics of one to the other, but rather we are meant to recognize what they share. In this way, we can understand the metaphysical conceit as ontologically renovating the human and its body.

Ramie Targoff confirms that such unorthodox philosophizing occurs in Donne's poetry. As an example, she offers a verse letter to the Countess of Bedford, "T'have written then, when you writ," wherein Donne theorizes that the body and soul can be mutually transforming, countering mainstream Protestant and Renaissance Neoplatonic beliefs about the merely supportive role of the body.¹⁵⁰ In this letter, Donne contends that the body and soul can inflict damage on one another. Innocent souls learn vice in their prison-like bodies just as the fallen soul brings sinfulness into the flesh.¹⁵¹ This is not the only time he challenges mainstream religious or philosophical beliefs. He does the same in one of his most famous poems from *Songs and Sonnets*, "The Extasie."¹⁵² Like "Air and Angels," this poem searches for a fit form for the glorious soul. Yet "The Extasie"

¹⁵⁰ See Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 271-5 for useful contrasting examples in Donne's *Holy Sonnets* where he employs strict Calvinist focus on the soul as the only meaningful part of the person.

For an analysis of Donne's relationship to major figures in Renaissance Neoplatonism, see Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul*, 58-9. See Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, arguably the period's most influential and widely read treatment of love, in which he describes "true love" as "nothing but a certain urge striving to fly up to the divine beauty aroused by the sight of bodily beauty" (233). Ficino's line on the hierarchy of body and soul is also clear: "Everything that a man is said to do his soul does itself; the body merely suffers it to be done; wherefore man is soul alone, and the body of man must be its instrument" (157). See also A.J. Smith, "The Dismissal of Love: Or, Was Donne a Neoplatonic Lover?," in *John Donne: Essays in Celebration*, ed. A.J. Smith (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1972), 89-131, in which he concludes that for Donne, "bodily desire isn't an impediment to love but may actually be essential to it" (129).

¹⁵¹ Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul*, 44.

¹⁵² Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, 53-56.

does not share the disdain for the human body's limitations that "Air and Angels" so clearly broadcasts—partially because "The Extasie" does not share the ethic found in "Air and Angels," Plato, or the Neoplatonism of Ficino that body and soul are ontologically independent.¹⁵³ Catherine Gimelli Martin identifies the speaker in this poem with Marsilio Ficino's radical Neoplatonist heirs, who did not believe that spiritual ascension meant purging the enlightened soul of its gross matter. Rather, they began to believe that "liberated matter" conducted the soul to light.¹⁵⁴ In this way, these radicals acknowledge a substantial change to the matter, or the body, that accompanies the soul's refinement.

"The Extasie" illustrates a version of this belief by trading the brutish and mechanical soul in "Air and Angels"—which takes a body and fixes itself in the body's features and which, unfortunately, will never find a physical form as elementally pure as spirit—for souls that interact with and attempt to refine bodies. Donne even develops his own terms, "intergraft" (9) and "interanimates" (42), to signal a shift from a traditional Neoplatonic dualism of body and soul to a wish that the lovers' bodies could mix as freely as the lovers' souls do. "The Extasie" is a poem about how partnership—the partnership of souls, primarily, and, to a lesser extent, the partnership of body and soul—can fundamentally transform both bodies and souls. "The Extasie" takes a step forward from "Air and Angels" by demonstrating how souls set the example for how the body is capable of transforming and should transform.

¹⁵³ This is a commonplace about the poem. See Arthur Marotti's classic essay, "Donne and 'The Extasie,'" in *The Rhetoric of Renaissance Poetry: From Wyatt to Milton*, ed. Thomas O. Sloan and Raymond B. Waddington (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 152-3; Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*, 20.

¹⁵⁴ Catherine Gimelli Martin, "The Erotology of Donne's 'Extasie' and the Secret History of Voluptuous Rationalism," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 44, no. 1 (2004): 133, [10.1353/sel.2004.0008](https://doi.org/10.1353/sel.2004.0008); and Gordon Worth O'Brien, *Renaissance Poetics and the Problem of Power* (Chicago: Institute of Elizabethan Studies, 1956), 67-78.

The first few stanzas of “The Extasie” convey the speaker’s frustration with the physical boundaries and limitations of the human body. The poem begins with the tantalizing awareness that every soul and every body longs to mingle with another: on a bank sits the speaker and his lover, “one another’s best” (4), who first try to accomplish oneness through physical unification, joined hands. The speaker’s frustration that the human body presents insurmountable physical boundaries to the kind of unification he and his lover desire emerges as he revises the description of how intensely they grasp one another; he strives to find a term that can erase the boundaries that divide them. First their hands are “firmly cemented” (5); then they are “intergraft[ed]” (9), Donne’s own neologism. In the redundancy of this word—insisting the hands are between one another and grafted one onto the other—and its borrowing from horticulture—imagining the hands as two tree stocks fused together and capable of propagating a brand-new type¹⁵⁵—the speaker expresses the failure of anthropocentric terms and the need to create a new language to describe a human physical form that yet behaves as human bodies cannot. Because the poem does not sustain or revisit this horticultural metaphor, I do not think Donne intends for the reader to necessarily hold in her head some likeness between the human and tree going forward. Rather, the brief reference is meant more generally to expand the reader’s sense that the kind of unification the speaker imagines requires that his and his lover’s bodies could interact in ways unavailable to the traditional human body.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ See “graft, v.1,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, December 2020, <https://www-oed-com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/Entry/80481?rkey=BLxjB3&result=6&isAdvanced=false> (accessed January 28, 2021).

¹⁵⁶ For an argument about how Donne represents touch as interpenetration, see Stokes, “‘We Prove Mysterious by This Love’,” 217-22. Stokes remarks that “Donne’s poems frequently mark a violability of and on the body’s edges” (220). Although, surprisingly, he does not comment on the invention or significance of “intergrafted” and the later, “interinanimation.”

Though the speaker leaves his and his lover's bodies lying as "sepulchral statues" (18) in order to focus in the middle of the poem on the two souls' mixture and conversion into an "abler soul" (43), there are reminders throughout the middle seven stanzas that this spiritual refinement affects the body as well. At first, the speaker imagines that the mingling of souls reveals the true sources of love, sources he doesn't fully disclose except to say that the body is not one of them—the love he and his beloved share has nothing to do with their biological sex (31). Although small, this detail is significant because it reminds the reader that no matter how refined, the soul still begrudgingly needs a body to express it. It also, equally importantly, suggests that the typical human body is not fit for these enlightened souls, souls that are outgrowing their typical human bodies. One of the ways they are growing and changing is through "interinanimat[ion]" (42), another neologism for "enmeshing" that recalls the intergrafted hands of the third stanza.¹⁵⁷ The recurrence of the "inter-" prefix and the fact that, in both cases, Donne invents a new verb suggests that love changes the body and soul in the same way—both the lovers' bodies and their souls are being meshed together, meshed together through completely new processes.

Catherine Gimelli Martin argues that the "interinanimation" of the lovers' souls distills the elements of their souls into a new *prima materia*; the "new soul...composed, and made" of new "atomies" (45-7) can "form whatever new nature they might will it to assume." This "new nature" does not just mean a new spiritual nature, but love has

¹⁵⁷ See Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul*, 55 on "interinanimation" as the "process by which spirit gets infused into a person; his neologism conveys a sense of motion, a forward thrusting of soul into body in a manner that the ordinary term 'animation' lacks." She also argues that the prefix "in" transforms animation into a mutual action.

“made the lovers’ material substance infinitely protean.”¹⁵⁸ Though the speaker must descend from the euphoric plane where his soul is compounded with his lover’s, he characterizes the resuscitated body in ways that suggest their soul-changing love has also changed the capacity and capabilities of the human form. Re-using the metaphor of the body as sphere from “Air and Angels,” he first hierarchizes the soul and body:

[Bodies] are ours, though they are not we, we are
The intelligences, they the sphere. (51-2)

I concur with Smith’s gloss of “sphere”—here following Aristotelian cosmology—as a “vehicle,”¹⁵⁹ first, because the next two lines specify the body’s ability to convey one lover to another:

We owe them [spheres] thanks, because they thus
Did us, to us, at first convey. (53-4)

Second, there are other figures associated with conveying something in the last half of the poem—for example, the body as “book” that conveys knowledge (72). And, third, reading “sphere” as simply any kind of vehicle aligns with the fact that this last movement figures the body in a variety of ways: as having fingers (63), but also as a prison (68). Reading “sphere” as any kind of vehicle allows for all of these various characterizations of the soul’s body to come to the fore and sit alongside one another. Subsequently, we begin to see these last stanzas as re-evaluating how a love-struck body looks and acts. This re-evaluation involves a distinctly and obviously material renovation which the speaker acknowledges: the body is no longer “dross to us, but allay” (56).

“Allay,” meaning today “alloy,” refers to mixtures, especially of greater- and lesser-value

¹⁵⁸ Martin, “The Erotology of Donne’s ‘Extasie’,” 136-7. Hyman reads soul and body as “interinanimated,” in line with the “the poem’s discursive situation tr[ying] to prove a monistic theory of matter and soul.” See Hyman, “Physics, Metaphysics, and Religion in Lyric Poetry,” 206.

¹⁵⁹ Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, 370n.52.

materials.¹⁶⁰ Alloyed, the compounded body is stronger or more resistant to corrosion or corruption. Even more, this description teases that the speaker and Donne are perhaps thinking of the human form as flexible, changeable, adulterated. There is a sense that the speaker is trying to fashion a body that is not as fixed in form and function as the human body—one that is, rather, an adaptable mixed-material vehicle.

There is no doubt that the physical body, no matter how refashioned the speaker might imagine it, is still incapable of reflecting the soul's full glory, and yet it is absolutely indispensable.¹⁶¹ At the end of the poem, the speaker accepts the function of the body and the need for the soul to be lodged in it:

so
Weak men on love revealed may look. (69-70)

Those who have not experienced the privileged revelation of love's sources and nature, who have not been trained to see the "atomies" that make up the love-struck soul, can only know love by looking at man's second material component—the body, which tries to mimic the souls' mixture. Despite the disappointment in both "Air and Angels" and "The Extasie" that the soul needs more than the organic human shape and matter to express its full glory, both poems take on the task of trying to imagine that fitter form. As a result, they provide a glimpse of Donne's radical responses to the question of what comprises the human.

Donne's responses show him embracing a human form that is materially changeable because that is what the soul needs. As is especially clear in "Air and

¹⁶⁰ "alloy, n.," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, September 2020, <https://www-oed-com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/Entry/5477?rskey=7Q6yv8&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed December 08, 2020).

¹⁶¹ Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul*, 57.

Angels,” that can mean erasing the ontological distinction between human and nonhuman altogether because the soul requires more than the typical human form to live in and through. That is not to say Donne doesn’t see differences between human and nonhuman, but they share an essential quality of their being that enables them both to facilitate the human soul. Even more, “The Extasie” underscores the desire for a changeable human form, one that mixes with others, because a mixed human form is even stronger and better able to facilitate the soul when it is not purely human, when it is fortified with nonhuman features. In these two poems, Donne is pushing toward a human form that is varied and multiple to the extent of even breaking down ontological distinctions between human and nonhuman.

The Many-Body Solution

Both speakers of “Air and Angels” and “The Extasie” express frustration over the insufficiency of the human body to represent or channel the soul’s full glory. Both poems also, if timidly or briefly, design a physical form that would be more capable—because less pre-determined or in other ways restricted—than the human body for transmitting the soul. These two poems trade the human body for a vehicle less fixed in form or function. In Donne’s verse letter to the Countess of Bedford, “Madam, you have refin’d me” (c. 1610), the speaker uses a different strategy to grapple with the same problem—the human body’s deficiency as a vehicle for the soul.¹⁶² Instead of trying to re-fashion the vehicle,

¹⁶² Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, 229-31.

For a detailed history of Donne and the Countess’s relationship as well as a history of Russell’s own role as courtier see Margaret Maurer, “The Real Presence of Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford, and the Terms of John Donne’s ‘Honour is So Sublime Perfection’,” *ELH* 47, no. 2 (1980): 205-34,

as the speakers of “Air and Angels” and “The Extasie” do, this speaker imagines that the soul can have several bodies—one typically human but paling in comparison to the Countess’ several other majestic, eminent, and religio-mythic forms. Inhering the soul in these other bodies is certainly an exercise in flattery and protection. On the one hand, the speaker indicates that the figure he profiles is, herself, too eminent for one form—and only a human form at that. But, on the other hand, profiling a Countess but not focusing on her human form, the speaker escapes any charges of impropriety—if his description is too detailed—or deficiency, if the Countess does not find his description flattering.¹⁶³ While proliferating different kinds of bodies for the Countess is a social tactic, it is still an opportunity to explore a thesis that the human lives in and through multiple and variable forms.

Focusing more on the Countess’ nonhuman forms, this epistolary poem advances this thesis in a new way, revealing figuration itself as an operation that can re-write and collapse ontologies. Whereas in “The Extasie,” the soul is the agent of material change, in this verse letter, Donne uses metaphor, metonym, something like blazon, and

<https://doi.org/10.2307/2872743>. A more recent treatment of Russell can be found in Julie Crawford, “‘His Factor for our loves’: The Countess of Bedford and John Donne,” in *Mediatrix: Women, Politics, and Literary Production in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 121-159. The authoritative study of the Countess is Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, “Exercising Power: The Countess of Bedford as Courtier, Patron, and Coterie Poet,” in *Writing Women in Jacobean England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 95-124.

¹⁶³ For more on the letters’ social effects, see David Aers and Gunther Kress, “Darke Texts need Notes: Versions of Self in Donne’s Verse Epistles,” in *Literature, Language and Society in England 1580-1680*, ed. David Aers, Bob Hodge and Gunther Kress (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1981), 23-48; and Margaret Maurer, “John Donne’s Verse Letters,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (1976): 234-59, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00267929-37-3-234>.

Maurer offers that Donne’s verse letters “typif[y] the problems of decorum,” especially the concern of private correspondence between patroness and patroness impinging upon their virtue. In this verse letter, Donne ameliorates that threat by associating the Countess of Bedford with divine or perfect things, thus “sidestep[ping] any pretentions to truth or specificity” and the sidestepping the risk of offending her or crossing the line that divides flattery from sexual advance. See Maurer, “John Donne’s Verse Letters,” 235, 250-4.

metaphysical conceit to determine the Countess' form, her shape and matter: she is a palatial temple of virtue, then a new edition of the Book of Fate, then the ideal form and transcript of all that is good and lovely. We know that the poem intends to gloss (for its readers as well as for the profane court¹⁶⁴) the Countess' physical incarnation of virtue because the speaker begins the letter saying as much:

For, as dark texts need notes: there some must be
To usher virtue, and say, *This is she*. (11-12, original emphasis)

Yet with so little time devoted to describing the Countess' human form—so little time especially compared to descriptions of the bodies in “Air and Angels” and “The Extasie”—what we know about the Countess's form is largely derived from figurations of her as nonhuman. Just as in the previous poems, it is these nonhuman bodies that appear far better equipped than a human form to carry the Countess' soul. The extent to which the speaker relies on nonhuman figuration in order to reveal *This is she* emphasizes both that figuration is the pathway to new and better forms and that figuration collapses ontologies such that the Countess can live in and across human and multiple nonhuman bodies.

Donne begins the verse letter with a metaphysical conceit that makes it seem utterly impossible that a human body could channel the Countess' virtue. The metaphysical conceit spans the first three stanzas of the poem, where the speaker describes the Countess as a controller of nature, to whom even the sun is a vulgar delegate (26). She is Spring incarnate: her arrival revives the flowers. She also disrupts the cycle of day and night, bringing with her (or from her emanating) a light that repurposes the earth's creatures, making them serve her as one would serve a deity,

¹⁶⁴ See lines 7-10.

obeying her and advertising her teachings. “[W]e sacrificers run,” the speaker describes himself and his fellow creatures,

And whether priests, or organs, you we obey,
We sound your influence, and your dictates say. (28-30)

The next stanza even begins with an address to

that deity which dwells in you,
Your virtuous soul. (31-2)

The primary purpose of the metaphysical conceit is to flatter the Countess on account of her influence. What is striking, however, is that the speaker does not need to actually physically figure her in this appeal. It looks as if he will elaborate her physical form when he figures her as a dwelling for her divine soul, but he leaves us tantalized at a non-descript “you”—this unfulfillment underscoring his reticence to describe her physical form. Indeed, her virtue and influence seem to emanate from a bodiless source (save for a face) whose appearance causes the flowers to bloom and emit their perfume (15-16). Throughout this conceit, the speaker evades defining the Countess’ body, characterizing her only as a light:

Out from your chariot, morning breaks at night,
And falsifies both computations so;
Since a new world doth rise here from your light. (19-21)

The speaker’s reluctance to consider her influence as a function of her physicality, or at least alongside her physical form—even though she *physically* effects the world around her—becomes even stranger when we arrive at the second movement of the poem, an audition in which he figures her in a variety of physical forms so that he may be permitted to “survey [her] edifice” in person (34).¹⁶⁵ It is strange because it seems absurd

¹⁶⁵ Crawford surmises that Donne hadn’t even met the Countess when he wrote the verse letters (Crawford, *Mediatix*, 121).

that the character he has created thus far—Spring incarnate, the source of a light capable of outshining and banishing the sun—fits into anything as restrictive as a bodily edifice.

Indeed, Donne tries for three stanzas to match the praise of the preceding stanzas, but he fails to find or fashion a single physical form for her. And, in fact, he conspicuously avoids acknowledging her human-organic body, except to metaphorize her eyes, hands and bosom as “pure altars” (46). He never descends from metaphor; she is an edifice, (confusingly) a seat of Catholic heresy, the book of Fate, and the transcript and original of all that is good and lovely. According to Targoff, Donne writes the verse letters believing in their power to affect and carry bodily presence, that they “carry traces of his physical being,” and that they had, literally, life-giving power—even the power to resurrect friends.¹⁶⁶ He even ends one letter with, “since I cannot stay you here, I will come thither to you; which I do, by wrapping up in this paper, the heart of *Your most affectionate servant J. Donne*.”¹⁶⁷ So when—given the chance and intention to describe the Countess in bodily and spiritual glory—he feints, we should evaluate how he physically figures her instead. Here we see the creative power of metaphor we observed in “Air and Angels” and “The Extasie” amplified: metaphorical figuration, specifically nonhuman embodiment, is the *only* way we can, just barely, observe the contours of what houses her soul. The opacity of her form persists primarily because of the figurations in the third quarter of the poem: first she is an heretical monument; then she is two things that (probably) have no real-world form to begin with—the mythical Book of Fate and the embodiment of all that is good and lovely.

The speaker’s selection of such challenging figurations suggests that he does not

¹⁶⁶ Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul*, 40, 43, and 45.

¹⁶⁷ Donne, *Letters*, 41, original emphasis.

aim to analogize her human and nonhuman forms—or clarify or develop her human form through comparison with these nonhuman entities. The speaker doesn't leave enough breadcrumbs for us to figure out whether or how her human and these nonhuman forms are materially similar. The lack of connection, or evidence we could use to connect her human and nonhuman forms, makes it appear that the speaker is not interested in comparison but rather in proliferation. Creating catachrestic-level difficulty, the speaker appears to want us to shift our focus wholly to how these nonhuman entities clarify the Countess' matter and shape on their own.

His first attempt continues precariously in the vein of flattery, ultimately suggesting that there may be no real-world shape to actually illustrate her. It's a precarious attempt because he gives the Countess a body neither she nor he would want her to have. The persona of a soon-to-be Protestant priest, the speaker analogizes his ability to glorify this staunchly Puritan Countess in a physical form to a Catholic pilgrim who goes to Rome not because of spiritual devotion but to be dazzled by the trappings. He describes this pilgrim as one who does not

Esteem religions, and hold fast the best,
But serve[s] discourse, and curiosity[.] (38-9)

If he were such a pilgrim, he would only be able to appreciate her as “virtue's temple, not as she,” virtue itself (44). Likewise, though he would be able to say that she is more radiant than any chapel, with “walls of tender crystal” and “eyes, hands, bosom” as “pure altars” (45-6), he would only be able to call her the Escorial (48), a 232-acre palace and monastery commissioned by Spain's King Philip II.¹⁶⁸ The point, I think, of this risky

¹⁶⁸ This is an extremely surprising figuration given Donne's and Bedford's anti-Catholicism. Crawford justifies it in two ways: “Donne's analogy thus both highlights Twickenhams's status as a semi-analogous headquarters of religious and political activism, and subtly mocks those very ambitions.” He backs away

characterization is to impress upon the Countess that her edifice surpasses even the most impressive heretical establishment. This characterization is, on the one hand, an apology for his “lay and country eye”—an eye too lowly to survey her edifice, an eye that is worthy only of viewing centers of heresy (50). On the other hand, the characterization is meant to flatter her as too glorious to be completely figured. Certainly her righteous Puritanism would make her more spiritually perfect and physically impressive than the Escorial; this benchmark, then, is meant to be absurd in order to convey the difficulty of figuring her with all the accuracy she deserves. To say that he imagines her as the Escorial is to say he cannot do justice to what she must really look like. In this way, he sets himself up to try again to more appropriately figure all of her abundant and mysterious glory.

Real-world forms having failed him, Donne resorts to figuring her as heavenly quintessence and shape-shifting matter—forms that allow him to honor and emphasize her multiplicity and super-humanness. The Countess is a revised book of Fate and the

transcript, and original,
The elements, the parent, and the growth

of everything that is good and lovely (56-7). These figurations suggest the Countess’ super-humanness. Describing her as the “record” and “prophecy” of both past and future stories, the speaker grants her immortality (52); she is a being who, in her physicality, represents what has been and will come. As the speaker insists that her virtues take physical, if not worldly, form—as a book, a record, a transcript, the elements—he simultaneously draws attention to her multiplicity and tendency to shape-shift. Twice he

from the audacity of figuring her as the Escorial by claiming that his evaluation is merely aesthetic: Bedford is “not as consecrate, but merely as fair” (Crawford, *Mediatrice*, 153).

has unequivocally characterized her and then revised his picture: “you th’ Escorial” (48) is supplanted by another absolute insistence that she is the book of Fate (54). He is clearly struggling to find the most accurate physical form to represent her glory—not to mention that each figuration moves further and further away from a physical form the reader can actually imagine as a human body, especially since he dispenses with corresponding specific physical features or parts of her body to the objects he unreservedly says she is. His struggle hits its apex in the third configuration of her as the transcript, original, elements, parent, and growth of the abstract qualities good and lovely (55-7). While trying to honor yet still trying to represent her shape-shifting and multiplicity, this description is almost useless for the purposes of clarifying *This is she* as it is too overloaded, so to seem like she is just “all” (58). However, the speaker seems to realize the uselessness of such expansive figurations—now so far from the metaphor of her body as an edifice—in the next stanza when he admits that these attempts “Taste of poetic rage, or flattery” (63) and that he rather “aliens” (66) her. His strange figurations, like strange attire, unnecessarily make her more exquisite than she is naturally and, therefore, might impede his attempt to reveal and annotate her.

He finally returns, then, to associating her physical body with an edifice, but in this second installment he splits her in two:

The mine, the magazine, the commonweal,
The story of beauty, in Twickenam is, and you. (69-70)

This last figuration divides responsibility for reflecting her between Twickenham, the Bedford country estate, and her body, as Donne insists, “Who hath seen one, would [have

seen] both” (71).¹⁶⁹ Both, apparently, are the source (“mine”), storehouse (“magazine”), home for a fractious state-within-a-state (“commonweal”), and story of beauty.¹⁷⁰ In the last stanza, then, the edifice is not a metaphor for the body, but both her body and Twickenham share and equally present this beauty. This is a variation of metonymy: Twickenham is not simply a metonym for the Countess, and it is not the only body displaying her beauty, but rather the speaker partners Twickenham with her organic body, conflates it with her organic body.¹⁷¹ Presenting her body and Twickenham side-by-side, this last stanza demonstrates clearly that, for Donne, humanity does not simply inhere in one kind of body. Beyond the substance of what the poem states, the way the poem indicates this, with a variation on metonymy, demonstrates that the literary device is complicit in—is leveraged to produce—this material doubling. The figuration here does not compare two extremely unlike things, but it effects a kind of catachrestic doubling and indicates that the Countess’ body and Twickenham share something essential in common that allows them to both reflect the Countess’ self, her “you.”

Hugh Grady articulates this power of poetry most poignantly in his recent book,

¹⁶⁹ I believe we can take “you” here as a contraction of “your body” because the quality, beauty, is one typically and most easily ascribed to a physical body.

¹⁷⁰ See *OED* for definitions of “mine” (1.c) and “magazine” (1.a). “mine, n.,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, December 2020, <https://www-oed-com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/Entry/118749?rskey=vG3pKQ&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed December 11, 2020). “magazine, n.,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, December 2020, Oxford University Press. <https://www-oed-com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/Entry/112144?rskey=hTpgv1&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed December 11, 2020). On “commonweal,” see Crawford, *Mediatrix*, 153n.103: Donne “consistently figures her in tension with monarchical prerogative.”

On “commonwealth” as a term more generally, see David Norbrook, “The Monarchy of Wit and the Republic of Letters: Donne’s Politics,” in *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century English Poetry*, ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey and Katharine Eisaman Maus (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 11-12. In the 1590s, “commonwealth” referred to, a state within a state made up of followers who were anxious for England to play a decisive part in shifting the balance of European politics away from Habsburg ascendancy, and who built up their own republic of letters, establishing close contact with republicans and religious radicals on the Continent.”

¹⁷¹ “The speaker’s desire to ‘survey’ the ‘edifice’—a conflation of Twickenham and Bedford herself—seems to be kind of a reconnaissance mission” (Crawford, *Mediatrix*, 152)

John Donne and Baroque Allegory: The Aesthetics of Fragmentation (2017), when he writes that in Donne's lyric poetry we can find examples of what Walter Benjamin coined "dialectics at a standstill."¹⁷² For both Benjamin and Donne, identity is "a dissonant union of opposites."¹⁷³ Paradoxically and fundamentally, unreconciled dissonance is the condition of unity for Donne. We see this construction of identity in the letter to the Countess where the second half of the poem is a series of attempts to find the right physical representation of her. The speaker characterizes the Countess by assembling all these diverse bodies—the Escorial, the Book of Fate, the transcript, original, elements, parent, and growth of everything good and lovely—without worrying about reconciling their differences.¹⁷⁴ This disinterest is clear in Donne's emphatic and concise insistence each time that the Countess *is* each one of these things: "you th' Escorial," "you are it" (The Book of Fate) (54), "And every piece of you is both their all" (goodness and loveliness) (58). That the most explicit union of opposites meant to capture the Countess' physicality, her organic human body and the estate of Twickenham, occurs after the speaker's dismissal of "poetic rage" means that his figurations are not mere fancy or fiction. In a number of ways, Donne insists that his diverse and outlandish figurations of the Countess are not merely poetical; rather there is a metaphysical concern about the materiality and ontology of the human underlying his several attempts to characterize her as different physical objects, finally culminating in representing her equally as an estate

¹⁷² Hugh Grady, *John Donne and the Baroque Allegory: The Aesthetics of Fragmentation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 126.

¹⁷³ Grady, *John Donne and Baroque Allegory*, 207.

¹⁷⁴ Wendy Beth Hyman's description of metaphysical conceit is apt here: "For the metaphysical conceit does not expatiate or dwell lavishly on its description...but rather forces a series of sharp impressions. In lieu of an exfoliating description, the poet provides a logical structure in which his seemingly outrageous ideas are engineered to make counter-intuitive sense." Hyman, "Physics, Metaphysics, and Religion in Lyric Poetry," 202.

and an organic human body. The poem represents “human” as a diverse assemblage of different physical forms: beauty is equally in her body and in Twickenham; she is the Book of Fate; she is a record and transcript of all goodness and loveliness.

In this way, we see Donne putting poetry and natural philosophy into a dialectical relationship such that his attempts to challenge forbearing theories from his contemporary anatomists and physicians about where humanity resides and what constitutes the human require adjusting poetic devices as well. In this verse letter, he does not use figuration to ornament, but rather to create. His metaphors, metaphysical conceits, and metonymies do not merely translate the characteristics from one form to another, but these devices are the readers’ only means to even partially or imperfectly understand the Countess’ physical form. Ultimately, with a figure that looks at first like metonymy, Donne reaffirms the metaphysical innovation of migrating humanity by splitting one of her most physical characteristics, her beauty, into two conflated bodies.

While all three poems I’ve read thus far diversify the physical forms that carry humanity, “Madam, you have refin’d me” offers the strongest, because most sustained, example of why “unity in multiplicity” has become the slogan describing the philosophical underpinning of early-seventeenth-century literature.¹⁷⁵ All three poems show that, for Donne, “unity in multiplicity” does not mean a “rich, complex simplicity,”

¹⁷⁵ See just a selection: Douglas Bush, *English Literature in the Early Seventeenth Century, 1600-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), 131; Grady, *John Donne and Baroque Allegory*, 34; Eugenio Canone, “Giordano Bruno (1548-1600): Clarifying the Shadows of Ideas,” in *Philosophers of the Renaissance*, ed. Paul Richard Blum and trans. Brian McNeil (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 228; Joseph Anthony Mazzeo, “Metaphysical Poetry and the Poetic of Correspondence,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 14, no. 2 (1953): 230, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2707472>; Louis M. Martz, “The Action of the Self Devotional Poetry in the Seventeenth Century,” in *Metaphysical Poetry*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), 101-121, esp. 104.

as Robert Hinman glosses it.¹⁷⁶ Donne's idea of unity does not simplify the natures of different bodies in order to make them neatly cohere into one singular form. Rather, in Donne's poetry, unconditioned various forms abound as Donne looks for the fittest forms to channel the soul.

The Soul's Creative Power

Amplifying the search for a fitter form to almost epic proportions, Donne's *An Anatomy of the World: The First Anniversary* (1611), spans heaven and earth, biblical past and early modern present, looking for forms whose characteristics and capabilities could present the spirit of a dearly-beloved and too-soon-departed young girl, Elizabeth Drury.¹⁷⁷ Drury was the daughter of a wealthy London landowner who once hosted Donne's sister as part of his household, but Donne never actually met the fourteen-year-old. Scholars, especially those involved in the first wave of science and literature studies, marvel at how Donne weaves together paean and critique of the so-called "new science" emerging at the time.¹⁷⁸ The poem has captured the attention of science-minded scholars because it associates Drury's death with the breakdown in worldly order, a breakdown the new science accelerated and encouraged: the

¹⁷⁶ Robert B. Hinman, "Apotheosis of Faust: Poetry and New Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century," in *Metaphysical Poetry*, 149-179, esp. 158.

¹⁷⁷ Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, 270-83.

¹⁷⁸ On Donne's treatment of the new philosophy in this poem, see just a selection: Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *The Breaking of the Circle: Studies in the Effect of the "New Science" upon Seventeenth-Century Poetry* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1950), 65-104; Catherine Gimelli Martin, "The Advancement of Learning and the Decay of the World: A New Reading of Donne's *First Anniversary*," *John Donne Journal* 19 (2000): 163-203; Mary Thomas Crane, "John Donne and the New Science," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Early Modern Literature and Science*, 95-114; Charles M. Coffin, *John Donne and the New Philosophy* (New York: The Humanities Press, 1958); David A. Hedrich Hirsch, "Donne's Atomies and Anatomies: Deconstructed Bodies and the Resurrection of Atomic Theory," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 31, no. 1 (1991): 69-94, <https://doi.org/10.2307/450444>.

new philosophy calls all in doubt
 ...'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone. (205, 213)

More specifically and most often, scholars have focused on the poem's anxiety about and skepticism of the developments in astronomy, developments which debunked Aristotelian and Ptolemaic philosophy.¹⁷⁹ The criticism in this vein very seldom descends from thirty-thousand feet, though: it often focuses on how the poem engages this or that school of philosophy. I don't endeavor to clarify Donne's allegiances, though I do focus on a very philosophical—metaphysical, in fact—development: how Drury's soul actually fashions its material bodies, one human-organic body and one, the very world itself. *The First Anniversary* resolves the frustration the speakers of "Air and Angels" and "The Extasie" feel regarding the soul's mismatch with a human body that cannot reflect the soul's full glory by ultimately demonstrating the soul's creative powers—fashioning the earthly vehicles it requires.

The terms of or practice of that fashioning deserve careful attention. There is no perfect word that syncretizes how, at some times, Drury's soul, lodged in the world, anthropomorphizes the world's operations, and, at other times, just like in the Countess of Bedford verse letter, Donne cautiously suggests something about Drury's physicality through descriptions of the soul-invested world (like when he metaphorizes the Countess' eyes, hands, and bosom as "pure altars"). In instances of the former, Drury's soul turns the world into something it is not, a human body. The title, *An Anatomy of the World*, primes the reader for this kind of relationship by applying a practice exclusively performed on a human—or at least vegetal or animal—body to the whole world itself, as if to say that the world is a body with organs and processes that resemble those of the

¹⁷⁹ Martin, "Advancement of Learning and the Decay of the World," 173.

creatures that live on it. In other places, however, the world's conditions serve as oblique metaphors describing Drury's human body's capabilities. With these metaphors, Donne copies a procedure from the verse letter: just as the serial metaphors in the verse letter ostensibly tell us *something* about the Countess' form but the specifics of that something become more and more opaque, the correspondence between the world and Drury's body is not at all clear. In other words, this poem challenges the accepted early modern analogy of microcosm/macrocosm that mapped body onto the world.¹⁸⁰ It is reasonable to see the relationship between body and world as one of correspondence, alignment, or resemblance—the practices commonly ascribed to figuration or metaphor but which Skulsky shows do not fully capture the depth of metaphor's work. However, I argue that this poem presents another perspective: the world is not only a metaphor hyperbolizing her physical form but actually another vehicle through which her soul works.¹⁸¹ In making the world one of Drury's physical vehicles, *The First Anniversary* showcases an important distinction between Donne the poet and Donne the priest, since Donne the poet figures a truth beyond the idea that the union of body and soul make up the man.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ The macrocosm/microcosm argument has its roots in Aristotle: the universe and the human body were united in the common bond of correspondence (Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*, 23). See also Sherwood, *Fulfilling the Circle*, 63: "the microcosmic body participates through likeness in these macrocosmic worlds; and Elizabeth D. Harvey and Timothy M. Harrison, "Embodied Resonances: Early Modern Science and Tropologies of Connection in Donne's *Anniversaries*," *ELH* 80, no. 4 (2013): 987, [10.1353/elh.2013.0038](https://doi.org/10.1353/elh.2013.0038). However, see Stokes, "'We Prove Mysterious by This Love'" and Jane Hedley, *Power in Verse: Metaphor and Metonymy in the Renaissance Lyric* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988) for challenges to this argument. Stokes argues that Donne's poetry disrupts the microcosm/macrocosm analogy that mapped body onto the world (221). Hedley describes the poem as citing "traumatic dislocations at every level of the universal order of things" (134).

¹⁸¹ For a discussion of the power of Donne's metaphors to physically transform, see Stokes, "'We Prove Mysterious by This Love'": in Donne "the physical *is* in a constant process of being carried across, carried between, two selves who are no longer just what they were before." Donne's metaphors literally remake the body (229, original emphasis). In arguing that the correspondence between Drury's human body and world is *not* always just analogical, I am countering Harvey and Harrison's claim in "Embodied Resonances," 987.

¹⁸² See above, "In the constitution and making of a natural man, the body is not the man, or the soul is not the man, but the union of these two makes up the man."

Likewise, the poem addresses the concern we have seen in the previous three poems: the soul needs more than just an organic human body to be glorified properly.

The poem begins by celebrating Drury's soul as an anthropomorphizing agent—lending the world human characteristics when she inhabits it and depriving it of them when she leaves. While on earth, she lent the world sense, memory, speech, and even its name—with her death now all are gone (28-31). Upon her death the world apparently becomes “speechless” (30), and her departure sends the world into a fit: “it joyed, it mourned,” rejoicing that her soul left behind a wretched world but lamenting that her death robbed the world of goodness (20). Without her, the world becomes “sick,” lethargic and wounded (23-5). It also loses its color and luster (355), and her death disrupts the natural seasons and the cosmos (381-8). Ensuring that the reader understands the immense gravity of this loss, the speaker puts it in no uncertain terms:

thou wast
Nothing but she. (31-2)

Indeed, Drury's soul brings the world an element crucial to its persona: a name. It is her name—“Her name defined thee” (37)—but before she arrived, “thou unnamed hadst laid” (35), and when her soul departs, the world “forg[ets] [its] name” (31). Between the anthropomorphizing of the world—“it joyed, it mourned”; it became lethargic and wounded—and the speaker's unqualified identification that the world *is* she, it's as if the speaker wants the reader to see the world as Drury's first body.

It's a body that her soul apparently forges—literally, physically, and fundamentally. Addressing the world, the speaker admits, “thee her palace made” (36), and in her name defining the world, it gives the world “form, and frame” (37). “Form,” “frame,” and “made” are three metaphors Kalas insists we have license to read as literally

creative procedures.¹⁸³ Here the speaker grants Drury's soul the physically creative power to partake of—rather than simply reflect—worldly reality, a power it shares with poetry, according to Kalas.¹⁸⁴ Donne uses language that, for early moderns, conveyed physical and ontological significance. “Frame,” for example, referred to the “internal orchestration” of a thing.¹⁸⁵ Its usage here reaffirms that the soul's creative power does not simply work superficially, dressing up the world. “Made,” “form,” and “frame” should all be read as three synonyms for a physical power Drury's soul exerts on the world, a power that affects the fundamental ontological workings of the world. In fact, the speaker even casts Drury's memory as now creating a new world with new creatures,

the matter and the stuff of this,
Her virtue. (77-8)

In this conception, her virtue is more than just creative; it is also physical matter, itself—an idea bolstered by the description of the soul as the substance holding the world together: she is the world's “cement,” “glue,” “intrinsic balm” and “preservative” (49, 50, 57). In making the world Drury's first body, these early figurations prepare the reader for the poem's revision to the idea that humanity is restricted to one kind of earthly body.

The poem signals its interest in theorizing a revised notion of humanity—one that accepts that the human soul can inhabit different kinds of bodies—in two of the poem's most famous assessments:

'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone;
All just supply, and all relation. (213-4)

¹⁸³ Kalas, *Frame, Glass, Verse*, 1.

¹⁸⁴ This is not the only time Donne suggests the soul's creative power upon the body. In the Countess of Bedford verse letter, “T’have written then, when you writ,” Donne wants to convey the damage inflicted on both parts of the self when the proper balance between them is not maintained. He blames the body for contaminating the soul and the soul for bringing sinfulness into the flesh (Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul*, 44).

¹⁸⁵ Kalas, *Frame, Glass, Verse*, 8.

There has been ample attention to these lines as crystallization of the poem's supposed thesis that the post-Drury world is completely barren.¹⁸⁶ But, as the poem is not just an elegy but also a meditation on what the world was and how it has changed, these lines indicate the poem's overarching philosophy of a new world in pieces—a philosophy that extends to the poem's conception of what it means to be human. That the speaker instills Drury in two such different physical bodies—the world and a human-organic one—suggests that, though fragmentation may have been an unwelcome and unexpected consequence of Drury's death, it is now the condition of the world. Thus, the poem eulogizes and describes Drury accordingly—fragmented and in ways that challenge sense and relation.

Such is the first, much-anticipated, description of Drury's organic form. Calling her the

first original
Of all fair copies (227-8),

the speaker goes on to describe a very untraditional ideal:

she whose rich eyes, and breast,
Gilt the West Indies, and perfumed the East;
Whose having breathed in this world did bestow
Spice on those isles, and bade them still smell so[.] (229-32)

Though this depiction reminds us of the Countess of Bedford, whose appearance awakens the smell of spices¹⁸⁷, the speaker of this poem goes to even greater lengths to evade any accusation of improperly surveying Drury's edifice by making this description somewhat nonsensical. He assigns her eyes and breast functions that they cannot possibly perform

¹⁸⁶ See note 178 above and add Victor Harris, *All Coherence Gone* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1949).

¹⁸⁷ Donne, "Madam, you have refin'd me," lines 15-16.

(even in a metaphysical conceit), gilding and perfuming. To this he adds another confusing image of her which flips the microcosm/macrocosm correspondence on its head:

to whom this world must itself refer,
As suburbs, or the microcosm of her. (235-6)

Reading these descriptions against the earlier complaint of the loss of coherence and relation, it almost seems that *she* was responsible for this loss, not her death. How eyes and a breast could gild and perfume escapes sense. Likewise, the world as a suburb or microcosm of Drury's pattern is a difficult image to reconcile with the previous figurations of her as making the world her palace. It is not Drury's death and the subsequent decay of the world that have destroyed coherence and relation. Rather, the poem's various and wholly untraditional figurations of Drury destroy all coherence and relation. Indeed, up until this moment the poem hasn't even figured her in a familiar way, expect to say that she "took the weaker sex" (179).

The physical attributes the speaker ascribes to Drury make it, once again, difficult to see her as adequately represented by just an organic human form. Details that figure Drury as omnipresent in the history of the world, just like the Countess, compound this difficulty. Following the medieval notion that the proportions of Noah's ark correspond to the proportions of the human body, the speaker describes Drury as the ark's "type," the pattern off of which it was constructed (319). The speaker implies that her body has existed since Biblical times at least. He calls her the "measure of all symmetry," (310)

She by whose lines proportion should be
Examined. (309-310)

Later, her composition is

miraculous,
Being all colour, all diaphanous. (365-6)

These figurations make her physical body at once glorious and also generic in the sense that she is both a model and, at least in one category, a full representation of everything contained in that category. Being “all colour” is analogous to the Countess being the record, transcript, original, parent, growth, and elements of goodness and loveliness. The descriptions are flattering but ultimately not all that helpful for understanding the human body—how its physical features register all these attributes. This and the letter to the Countess demonstrate that it’s impossible to have a clear and distinct sense of what the human body looks like when the speaker also wants to acknowledge the soul’s abundance.¹⁸⁸ Over-prescribing attributes to Drury’s body is just another way to illustrate the fact that the soul’s virtue exceeds what the human body is capable of rendering: though the speaker refers to physical characteristics the body would portray, he omits how the body actually physically illustrates these characteristics. Thus, again, we come back to two related theses for Donne the poet: the soul’s virtue surpasses what the human body is capable of adequately representing, and, second, the soul then needs various bodies—human and nonhuman—in and through which to live.

Conducting this work in poetry helps to distinguish fiction’s relation to and engagement with the real world from natural philosophy’s. Whereas seventeenth-century natural philosophy was satisfied with ordering, organizing, and explaining the conditions of the universe, Donne’s poetry tenaciously illuminates the fundamental instability underlying real-world conditions, and it does so through poetic procedures that,

¹⁸⁸ On color and shape as properties of the animal spirit, see Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, ed. and trans. Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark (Binghamton: Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1989), bk. 3, ch. 11, pg. 297.

themselves, evolve with regard to their praxis. Donne's figurative devices don't just embellish, make connections, or disguise one thing as another, but they actually create new worldly forms and even spur new metaphysical ideas about living as a human.

The proposition that humanity is not restricted to one body but is rather something that can be shared by all kinds of diverse bodies is unsettling on its own, but the way it unfolds in Donne's poetry showcases a previously unrecognized innovation in Donne's poetry. The four poems I've studied here utilize figuration not to liken or compare the organic human form to the other objects that channel the soul—a cosmological sphere, the Book of Fate, the Twickenham estate, and, finally, the world itself—but rather to illuminate the shared ontology of human and nonhuman. Disordering the category of what it means to be human, Donne demonstrates disorder as a metaphysical principle—one that, crucially, is both life-giving and life-supporting.

The play I turn to next, Shakespeare and Middleton's *Timon of Athens* (c. 1608), does not just continue the work of disordering the boundary between human and nonhuman in life-giving and life-supporting ways, but it actually theorizes a metaphysics of disorder: disorder's precise procedures. Leaning in to Donne's charge that the world is all in pieces is actually a center-piece of the theory and praxis of disorder *Timon of Athens* presents. The play portrays disorder as an anti-teleological process: disorder means disassembling without necessarily re-assembling the pieces. This unsettling, unresolved act requires us to face the fact that, above all, disorder is a process that seeks and proliferates change and variety.

“Let confusion live”: A Poetics of Satire from *Timon of Athens*

A search for an early modern text embodying the *ethos* of disorder can cease at a play that, “weak, ill-constructed and confused,” “disturb[s] critics”: William Shakespeare and Thomas Middleton’s *Timon of Athens* (c. 1608).¹⁸⁹ In the long history of criticism on the play, assessments of it as things like “ill-constructed and confused” are often rooted in the fact that this collaboration was likely unfinished and, therefore, unpolished. Nowhere is this concern—that incompleteness causes supposedly-intolerable confusion—clearer than in the most recent Arden editors’ defense of their decision to cut a part of the text often thought of as a blatant sign of its incompleteness: “we need first to make sense of the action itself before we can appreciate, or even see, what else is going on.”¹⁹⁰ The first thing a position such as this one does is beg the question of whether it is incumbent upon an editor to “make sense” of a text if the text does not, as they deem it, make sense. The second thing it does is elevate making-sense as a text’s most important attribute, as if making-sense is key to enjoyment or critical analysis. But an assessment of *Timon* as a character, written at almost the exact same time as this justification and by none other than one of the Arden editors, indicates that forcing the play into order, forcing it to “make sense,” erases one of the play’s most distinguishing and challenging aspects: its insistence that we sit with uncertainty and lack of clarity. Thus, Anthony Dawson describes *Timon* as “somehow pre- or post-character, a figure on the outer edge of

¹⁸⁹ See G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearean Tragedy* (New York: Routledge, 1930), 251 for the first opinion and, for the second, Una Ellis-Fermor, “*Timon of Athens*: An Unfinished Play,” *The Review of English Studies* 18, no. 71 (1942): 270, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/509121>.

¹⁹⁰ Anthony B. Dawson and Gretchen E. Minton, introduction to *Timon of Athens*, by William Shakespeare and Thomas Middleton, ed. Anthony B. Dawson and Gretchen E. Minton (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2008), 109.

representation.”¹⁹¹ The indecision—that Timon is “pre- or post-character”—and the ultimate conclusion—that he is somewhat indeterminate, “on the outer edge of representation”—encourage us to account for the play’s illegibility without trying to resolve it. Even if disappointed with the play, studies that tarry with it as “confused,” as well as “strikingly bipolar”¹⁹² and “unaccommodating,”¹⁹³ support the idea that frustrating categories and definitions is actually central to the intellectual and poetic work the play undertakes.

Indeed, rather than trying to force the play to make sense, to cohere, or to follow a formula, many late-twentieth and twenty-first-century scholars find the play’s confusion and recalcitrance toward attempts to understand it critically-motivating. Scholarship on *Timon of Athens*’ genre has all along acknowledged the play’s frustrating indeterminacy as critically productive. John Heminges and Henry Condell, Shakespeare’s friends and printers of the First Folio, initially grouped the play with the Tragedies, but scholars have identified different, conflicting generic elements in it—from morality play, *de casibus* tragedy, romance, domestic comedy, and masque.¹⁹⁴ *Timon of Athens*’ generic indeterminacy, coupled with the fact that it is an ultimately acerbic interrogation and critique of society, has led many scholars to follow Samuel Taylor Coleridge and later

¹⁹¹ Anthony Dawson, “Is Timon a Character?,” in *Shakespeare and Character: Theory, History, Performance, and Theatrical Persons*, ed. Paul Yachnin and Jessica Slights (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 204.

¹⁹² Coppélia Kahn, “A Modern Perspective,” in *Timon of Athens*, by William Shakespeare, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013), 217.

¹⁹³ Thomas Cartelli, “The Unaccommodating Text: The Critical Situation of *Timon of Athens*,” *The Bucknell Review* 29, no. 2 (1985): 81-105.

¹⁹⁴ See Robert Wilcher, “*Timon of Athens*: A Shakespearian Experiment,” *Cahiers élizabéthains: A Journal of English Renaissance Studies* 34, no. 1 (1988): 61-78, esp. 61 and 76n.16, <https://doi.org/10.1177/018476788803400110>; and William W.E. Slights, “*Genera mixta* and *Timon of Athens*,” *Studies in Philology* 74, no. 1 (1977): 39-62, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4173926>.

Alvin Kernan in recognizing the play as a “satirical drama” or “satire.”¹⁹⁵ While Coleridge favored the term because of the play’s overwhelmingly corrosive tone and events, Kernan observed the play’s structure. Joining the thin ranks of theorists who trace the etymology of “satire” to the Latin *satur* or *satura*, meaning “a mixture,”¹⁹⁶ Kernan asserts that early modern satires emulated Juvenalian construction: moving rapidly, without transition or connection, between scenes and criticizing diverse events and people without following any pattern.¹⁹⁷ He defines “satire” as a “medley” and “a contrivance of farragoes rather than articulated wholes.”¹⁹⁸ Thus, satire characterizes the very *ethos* the play’s scholars lament.

I argue that the play endorses its generic label with the repetition of two words, used more times in this play than in any other by Shakespeare: “confusion” and “confound.” Derived from the Latin *confundere*, these words refer to processes of blending, pouring together, mixing, and mingling as well as diffusing, suffusing, and

¹⁹⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge’s Shakespearean Criticism*, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930), 108. See Oscar James Campbell, *Shakespeare’s Satire* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1963), which calls it a “tragical satire” (168); Wilcher, “*Timon of Athens*,” 69-75; Robert E. Morsberger, “*Timon of Athens*: Tragedy or Satire?,” in *Shakespeare in the Southwest: Some New Directions*, ed. T.J. Stafford (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1969), 56-70; Slights, “*Genera mixta and Timon of Athens*,” 39; Alvin Kernan, *The Cankered Muse: Satire of the English Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 198-205.

¹⁹⁶ Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, s.v. “satur” and “satura,” *A Latin Dictionary*, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>.

¹⁹⁷ Kernan, *The Cankered Muse*, 73-4.

These ranks include Thomas Drant, *A mediciniable morall, that is, the two bookes of Horace, his satyres, Englyshed accordyng to the prescription of saint Hierome. The wailyns of the prophet Hieremias, done into Englyshe verse. Also epigrammes* (London, 1566), a.iv”; André Dacier, “An Essay upon Satyr,” in *Miscellany poems upon several occasions consisting of original poems / by the late Duke of Buckingham, Mr. Cowly, Mr. Milton, Mr. Prior, Mrs. Behn, Mr. Tho. Brown, &c. ; and the translations from Horace, Persius, Petronius Arbiter, &c. ; with an essay upon satyr, by the famous M. Dacier.*, trans. Charles Gildon (London, 1692), A^v and B^r; Dryden quotes Juvenal calling his poems, a “Farrago.” See John Dryden, “To the Right Honourable Charles, Early of Dorset and Middlesex, Lord Chamberlain of the Majesties Household: Knight of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, &c,” in *The satires of Decimus Junius Juvenalis translated into English verse by Mr. Dryden and several other eminent hands ; together with the satires of Aulus Persius Flaccus, made English by Mr. Dryden ; with explanatory notes at the end of each satire ; to which is prefix’d a discourse concerning the original and progress of satire ... by Mr. Dryden* (London, 1693), xlvii.

¹⁹⁸ Kernan, *The Cankered Muse*, 5.

spreading over.¹⁹⁹ The frequency of their appearance—eleven times for “confound” and its variations, four for “confusion” and its variations²⁰⁰—not only insists that “medley” and “farrago” appropriately describe the ethics and conditions for life in Athens, but it also suggests that confusion, mixing and mingling, is the poetic operation that structures the play’s satire.²⁰¹

Compositionally, early modern satires strove for “an ordered disorder,” representing multiplicity and chaos without succumbing to the fragmentation of the world they reflect.²⁰² According to its etymology, confusion is just such a disordering operation: a neutral operation—mixing, mingling, diffusing, suffusing—or condition of order—medley, farrago—before it describes the assumed negative product of such an operation or condition—“destruction” or “ruin,” as many of the play’s critics have glossed the word.²⁰³ In fact, Timon’s climactic outburst when he self-exiles from and condemns Athens, “let confusion live,” should make critics pause to consider how the play views

¹⁹⁹ Lewis and Short, s.v. “confundere,” *A Latin Dictionary*.

²⁰⁰ Compared to the next highest: four times for “confound” and once for “confusion” in *Antony and Cleopatra*; once for “confound” and three times for “confusion” in both *Coriolanus* and *Cymbeline*.

²⁰¹ Though she does not name the play’s genre, Laura Kolb describes the play’s structure in a related way: “the play’s structuring tensions [are] part of a consistent artistic program that requires us to do the difficult work of thinking contradictory things at once” and “internal contradiction functions as a principle of the play’s construction.” See Laura Kolb, “Debt’s Poetry in *Timon of Athens*,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 58, no. 2 (2019): 400, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sel.2018.0017>.

²⁰² Kernan, *The Cankered Muse*, 86.

²⁰³ Their assumptions reflect not just modern use of the term but also its early modern connotations. See William N. West, “‘But this will be a mere confusion’: Real and Represented Confusions on the Elizabethan Stage,” *Theatre Journal* 60, no. 2 (2008): 219, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25070198>. However, other instances of “confusion” in Shakespeare’s oeuvre confirm his more etymologically-derived sense of the word, where it describes a condition of order. For example, in 2 *Henry VI*, Young Clifford cries,

Shame and confusion! All is on the rout;
Fear frames disorder, and disorder wounds
Where it should guard. (5.2.31-33)

William Shakespeare, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans and J.J.M. Tobin, et al., 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), 668-710.

confusion as enabling life—even if the quality of that life is not easy or ideal (4.1.21).²⁰⁴

The present chapter does just that by arguing that “confused” characterizes the play’s poetic operations—its specific kind of satiric disorder—and its condition for living and quality of life. This means that the play critiques and corrects a way of living that promotes organization, stability, and hierarchy in its ethics and politics; instead, disorder usurps the throne: life is neither (re-)ordered nor destroyed.²⁰⁵ That is, the play doesn’t resolve in the destruction or regeneration of Athens as a city or Athenian life; rather, the conditions for living are left confused—simply mixed and mingled—when Alcibiades, an Athenian soldier-turned-exile-turned-conqueror of Athens closes the play while about to re-enter Athens with,

Make war breed peace, make peace stint war, make each
Prescribe to the other, as each other’s leech. (5.5.81-2)

Peace and war, seeming opposites, actually feed each other, and it is unclear which will follow Alcibiades’ victory. But this uncertainty makes sense for this play: the objective of *Timon of Athens*’ satire is not to endorse an opposite but to create medleys and farragoes that mingle oppositions.²⁰⁶

That neither war nor peace alone, but some tangle or circuit of the two, will pervade Athens after Alcibiades’ victory demonstrates that confusion is not a teleologically-oriented process; its product is neither defined nor finished. Moreover, the

²⁰⁴ William Shakespeare and Thomas Middleton, *Timon of Athens*, ed. Dawson and Minton. All citations of the play included in-text and from this edition unless otherwise noted.

²⁰⁵ Critique and correction are what readers, early modern and contemporary ones alike, typically associate with satire. Alexander Barclay’s *The Ship of Fools of the Worlde* (1509) was the first text in English to use “satire” in this way, as a text that accomplished “the reprehencion of foullysshnes” (Kernan, *Cankered Muse*, 54).

²⁰⁶ See Crane, *Losing Touch with Nature*, where she avers that Shakespeare’s imagination was deeply affected by “new possibilities for combination and recombination and for the multiplication of difference that mathematical theory was introducing in late sixteenth century [*sic*] England” (131).

paradox that both peace and war will continue to thrive (and support one another) indicates that trying to understand the product of confusion by comparing it to what preceded it does not get us very far. Therefore, representing this play's confused conditions for living requires an equally confused poetic procedure.

Timon of Athens develops, what I call, a “confused poetics”: it creates by mixing constituent parts in such a way that the product cannot be classified satisfactorily by measuring likeness to or difference from any of its constituent parts or predecessors. A “confused poetics” requires, therefore, conceiving of poetic mimesis as not based in a resemblance—likeness to or difference from what preceded it—as scholars have often assumed of the practice. As I showed in my Introduction, this is an assumption easily supported by passages from Sidney's *Defence* where he claims that the poet brings forth another, better nature. But, actually, *The Defence* leaves the precise operations of poetic mimesis—representing, counterfeiting, figuring forth—opaque.²⁰⁷ I argue that *Timon of Athens* not only clarifies poetic mimesis' operations, but it encourages thinking of mimesis in a wholly unexpected way: as a process of mixing, producing an object whose identity is too multiple to be secured or too multiple to be described as overwhelmingly resembling one of its constitutive parts.

It becomes abundantly clear from the first scenes satirizing a Poet and Painter that the play does not consider imitation a process rooted in resemblance or likeness, as theorists of mimesis, from Aristotle to Sidney to contemporary literary critics, have

²⁰⁷ See Sidney, *Defence*, 8-9. See also Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*, esp. 14, 44-64, and 155-74. Halliwell discourages the translation of mimesis as “imitation” precisely because it puts too much emphasis on verisimilitude. He also discusses an engraving from Giovanni Bellori's *The Lives of the Artists* (1672), a tome influential on the development of aesthetics, in which “wise imitation” gazes into a mirror while also treading on an ape. This dichotomy signifies the preference for a more sophisticated kind of mimesis than the kind of surface-emulation early modern intellectuals pejoratively associated with aping (357).

somewhat silently agreed.²⁰⁸ Thus, in this play, correspondence and comparison are the wrong principles for evaluating or making art. Over and over, a focus on likeness is condemned—and not just because of the short step from likeness to misleading and malicious illusion. Beyond its concerns about resemblance and deception, the play imagines living in a world without fixed boundaries between categories, like human and nonhuman or even the boundaries between individual humans. The concept of likeness depends upon these boundaries; it is impossible to say something is “like” something else if, in reality, qualities are simply shared—mixed, mingled, diffused, and suffused—among different kinds of entities.²⁰⁹ Thus, the play imagines life persisting not by replication but by confusion. By adopting confusion, instead of resemblance, as its poetic operation, *Timon of Athens* therefore re-envisioned both the art of imitation and the subsequent attributes of the golden world poesy figures.

Poesy without Resemblance

Timon of Athens accosts the audience with its disavowal of likeness most obviously and immediately by satirizing a Poet and Painter, who open the play locked in a well-known Ancient academic debate which, since the nineteenth century, has been called a *paragone*: they vie for the prestige of having created the piece that most closely resembles their world.²¹⁰ While as far back as the Middle Ages, poetry was championed

²⁰⁸ See Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1447^a-1448^b; Sidney, *Defence*, especially 326n.42; Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Thought*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953). As noted above, see Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*, for a contrarian view of mimesis.

²⁰⁹ See the previous chapter's discussion of Skulsky's work on metaphor.

²¹⁰ Humanists would have been accustomed to seeing *paragone* in the forms of prose or non-dramatic poetry, but it was anticipated in the theatrical medium just several years earlier by an entertainment likely written by John Lyly and presented to Queen Elizabeth at Mitcham in 1598. See John Lyly, *Queen Elizabeth's Entertainment at Mitcham: Poet, Painter, and Musician*, ed. Leslie Hotson (New Haven: Yale

over painting as the more valuable art—capable of depicting anything that comes to mind, visual or not; encouraging freedom of the imagination; and a better instrument for moral and religious teaching²¹¹--by the early sixteenth century, the opposite position was also argued, most notably by Leonardo da Vinci, whose comparisons of the arts inspired the term *paragone*.²¹² Specifically when it came to evaluating art's ability to imitate reality, da Vinci prized painting as the best leveler of the boundaries between art and reality because it "represent[s] Nature in such a way as to be able to assume the appearance of its identity, even surpassing it in naturalness."²¹³ In *Timon of Athens*, too, the Painter ultimately triumphs by finding more favor with the profligate protagonist than the Poet does, suggesting that the play is interested in evaluating art according to da Vinci's criterion: art's imitation of nature. However, Shakespeare's²¹⁴ satirization of the Poet and Painter and their *paragone* indicates disdain for measuring their pieces according to their resemblance to reality. That is, the play theorizes that art should imitate nature but not necessarily resemble it.

One source for the *paragone* debate is a set of aphorisms Plutarch attributed to

University Press, 1953). For the history of the term, "paragone," see Claire J. Farago, *Leonardo da Vinci's Paragone: A Critical Interpretation with a New Edition of the text in the Codex Urbinas* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1992), 8-14.

²¹¹ See Henryk Markiewicz and Uliana Gabara, "Ut Pictura Poiesis... A History of the Topos and the Problem," *New Literary History* 18, no. 3 (1987): 535-7, <https://doi.org/10.2307/469057>; and Lucy Gent, *Picture and Poetry, 1560-1620: Relations between Literature and the Visual Arts in the English Renaissance* (Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, England: James Hall, 1981).

²¹² Farago clarifies that da Vinci never used the term, though he commonly used the verb, *paragonare*, meaning "to compare," and other cognates, *paragonabile* ("comparable") and *paragonando* ("comparing"). Likewise, "it is doubtful that anyone living during the Renaissance referred to any literary form as a 'paragone'" (*Leonard da Vinci's Paragone*, 9).

²¹³ Heinrich F. Plett, "Pictura Rhetorica: The Rhetorical Conceptualization of the Visual Arts and Pictorial Poetry," in *Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 297-309.

²¹⁴ Though critics, by and large, have accepted the co-authorship of the play, linguistic analysis has equipped them to make reasonable speculations about the division of labor. This scene is likely Shakespeare's alone. For a hypothesized breakdown of Shakespeare's and Middleton's contributions, see Appendix 2 of Shakespeare and Middleton, *Timon of Athens*, ed. Dawson and Minton, 401-7.

Simonides which have resemblance implicit in them: “poetry is articulate painting, and painting is inarticulate poetry.”²¹⁵ Unsatisfied that this chiasmic saying alone did not explain poetry’s purpose, Plutarch drew out the comparison embedded in it and made it encompass and describe poetry’s project:

...but let us teach him in addition that when we see a lizard or an ape or the face of Thersites in a picture, we are pleased with it and admire it, not as a beautiful thing, but as a likeness...the imitation, be it concerned with what is base or with what is good, if only it attain to the likeness, is commended.²¹⁶

Here we see the germ of the notion that imitation requires likeness, a notion that goes unremarked and unquestioned in the early modern definitions of poesy, especially as Horace’s much more explicitly comparative, “*ut pictura poesis*,” “as painting, [so is] poetry,” became one of the slogans for the essence of literature.²¹⁷

This imperative for likeness drives the early modern *paragone* debates—both real and imagined. However, these debates tend to sidestep the resemblance of poetry and painting to one another and rather focus on their resemblance to nature or the world. Again, da Vinci, working his way through the competition, concludes that painting is the better art form because it represents the works of nature with more truth and certainty than words can.²¹⁸ He arrives at this conclusion by considering whether a blind man hearing a poem will be able to decipher his object more clearly than a deaf man looking at a painting can decipher his. He reasons that the deaf man will better understand what a painting represents because painting strives to mirror what the observer sees in and

²¹⁵ Plutarch, “How the Young Man Should Study Poetry,” in *Plutarch’s Moralia*, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt, vol.1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), 93.

²¹⁶ Plutarch, “How the Young Man Ought to Study Poetry,” 93.

²¹⁷ Horace, *Satires, Epistles, and Ars Poetica*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), 481. The analogy inspired treatises comparing poetry’s and painting’s representational capabilities, even though, in its context, Horace discusses the sensual impression of the two arts.

²¹⁸ Farago, *Leonardo da Vinci’s Paragone*, 186.

knows of the real world. The blind man has no images of the real world to begin with, and, in any case, poetry embellishes to make the real world pleasing. da Vinci implies that truth and certainty are accessed through likeness and comparison.²¹⁹

Closer to home, an entertainment attributed to John Lyly and presented to Queen Elizabeth in 1598 at Mitcham, the estate belonging to her Master of Requests and Judge of the Admiralty, contends with the same basic problem: Which produces the best “true copie” of a natural work—poetry, painting, or music?²²⁰ In this case the conversation takes a daring turn toward analyzing an unfinished painting of the Queen, which the Painter explains he has postponed finishing because he has not been able to grind out a pure enough color to match the Queen’s pure color: “her perfection admitteth no coloring.”²²¹ The politic flattery continues in all the expected ways, with the Painter commenting on the impossibility of “sett[ing] downe her vertues...[and] beawtye: the one not coming within the compas of Art, nor the other of imagination,”²²² and the Poet admitting, “for though I cannot expresse all her worth, yet so much I can, as shall make all men wonder.”²²³ Eventually, in a supremely expedient move, they present the Queen with not a rendering of her at all but rather with a dress “as a fitter obiect for our artes,” something that presumably comes within the “compas of Art,” imagination, and, most importantly, imitation.²²⁴ Two very important things happen here: first, and typically, the Poet and Painter humble themselves, and their art, as incapable of capturing the Queen’s transcendent virtue and beauty. Any likeness of her would pale in comparison to her, so it

²¹⁹ Farago, *Leonardo da Vinci’s Paragone*, 215-7.

²²⁰ Lyly, *Queen Elizabeth’s Entertainment at Mitcham*, ln. 107.

²²¹ Lyly, *Queen Elizabeth’s Entertainment at Mitcham*, ln. 130.

²²² Lyly, *Queen Elizabeth’s Entertainment at Mitcham*, ln. 133-5.

²²³ Lyly, *Queen Elizabeth’s Entertainment at Mitcham*, ln. 176-8.

²²⁴ Lyly, *Queen Elizabeth’s Entertainment at Mitcham*, ln. 252-3.

is best not to try. Instead they will focus their attention on constructing (the Painter) and commending (the Poet) a gown, a metonym for her but, crucially, not something that resembles or looks like her. Because they implicitly think of their art as rendering likeness, they shy away from rendering any likeness of her, lest they offend her. Consequently, however, they undermine the assumption of the *paragone* debate—that one art or the other is capable of making something that assumes the appearance of, even surpasses the realness of, something quite real, the Queen.

The real-life *paragone* between Ben Jonson and artist-architect Inigo Jones, Jonson's one-time collaborator on masques in the 1610s and 1620s, appears to eventually (at least on one side) arrive at this same doubt, that art cannot perfectly represent—to the point of being able to replace—its subject.²²⁵ Predictably, Jonson argues for poetry's supremacy over visual art because poetry can offer “understanding,” where painting offers merely “sense.”²²⁶ Poetry reflects understanding by acting as a “mirror,”²²⁷ which makes readers think, “This is no picture, but the same.”²²⁸ While meeting da Vinci on the same grounds of art striving to replicate a realness, Jonson escalates expectations for art by insisting that poetry mirrors a transcendent idea—a “fore-conceit” in Sidney's

²²⁵ The reason for the one-sided doubt is that Jones's opinions about Jonson, their falling out, or his theories of art have not survived. On the Jonson-Jones quarrel, see Judith Dundas, “Ben Jonson and the *Paragone*,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 9, no. 4 (1978): 57-65, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2540043>, and D.J. Gordon, “Poet and Architect: The Intellectual Setting of the Quarrel between Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 12 (1949): 152-178, <https://doi.org/10.2307/750261>.

²²⁶ In *Timber*, Jonson writes, “Yet of the two, the pen is more noble than the pencil. For that can speak to the understanding; the other, but to the sense.” See Jonson, “Appendix I: *Timber: or Discoveries*,” in *Ben Jonson: The Complete Poems*, 373-458, esp. 419, lns. 1872-5. Lyly makes the same point in his *Entertainment*, with the Poet contending, “but in our artes are as greates oddes as betweene seeing and vnderstanding” (Lyly, *Entertainment*, ln. 13-14).

²²⁷ Jonson, “*The Forest XIII Epistle. To Katherine, Lady Aubigny*,” in *Ben Jonson: The Complete Poems*, 113-117, esp. 114, ln. 43.

²²⁸ Jonson, “*Underwoods LXXXIV. Eupheme*,” in *Ben Jonson: The Complete Poems*, 234-247, esp. 238, ln. 24.

words²²⁹—not just a surface appearance of what is seen in nature.²³⁰ He expects poetry to surpass nature’s naturalness because it presences a transcendent idea even more truthfully than nature does. Yet, Jonson maintains no illusions that poetry can perfectly presence an idea. In an exchange with Sir William Burlase, he admits that “A poet hath no more but black and white” to express an idea.²³¹ And in *Poetaster* (1601) Gallus concedes that even master Virgil’s poetry falls short in rendering the idea he has in mind:

As if his mind’s piece, which he strove to paint,
Could not with fleshly pencils have her right.²³²

Jonson settles for the disappointment that poetry is limited in its representational capabilities instead of questioning or re-imagining the operations of art-making. *Timon of Athens*, by contrast, discards the assumption that poetry represents by resembling and re-theorizes poetry’s operations, expecting poetry to produce more than a copy of what is seen in the world and an understanding of what is already known. With this innovation, the play attempts to accomplish the ultimate goal Sidney sets for poesy: a representation of “what may be and should be” (albeit, one no one would envy).²³³

Timon of Athens actively opposes a likeness-based mimetic operation in favor of confusion—mixing and diffusing—as a mode of poetic representation. Fittingly, the Poet’s pretentious description of poetry’s procedures reveals this proposition when he describes poetry, according to the First Folio, as

...a Gowne, which vses

²²⁹ Sidney, *Defence*, 9.

²³⁰ On this distinction in the history of theorizing mimesis, see Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*, especially chapters 10 and 11, which trace the Neoplatonic interpretations of mimesis. Jonson’s writings reveal a strong allegiance to such interpretations.

²³¹ Jonson, “*Underwoods*. LII (A Poem Sent Me by Sir William Burlase),” in *Ben Jonson: The Complete Poems*, pg. 199, ln. 20.

²³² Ben Jonson, *Poetaster, or The Arraignment*, in *Ben Jonson: The Devil is an Ass and Other Plays*, ed. Margaret Jane Kidnie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 5.1.114-5.

²³³ Sidney, *Defence*, 11.

From whence 'tis nourisht: the fire i'th'Flint
 Shewes not, till it be strooke: our gentle flame
 Prouokes it selfe, and, like the currant flies
 Each bound it chases.²³⁴

Three vastly different metaphors (even metaphysical conceits) in five lines—describing poetry as a gown, a flame, and water's current—tells us a number of things about the Poet and his mastery of his craft. The first two vexing verses prime us for an inscrutable definition (more pronounced in the Folio lines than in the modernization, to which I'll turn shortly). These verses characterize poetry, nonsensically, as a gown using its source of nourishment—perhaps meaning to image a gown growing out from its spool. The last two verses compare poetry to a current flowing over its impediments, an image that gestures at the play's larger satirical critique and correction of ordered and hierarchized life: just as poetry apparently flows and seeps into everything, confusion dismantles the boundaries between peace and war, inside Athens and outside Athens, man and beast. Both of these images—the self-making gown and boundless current—indicate the impossibility of restraining poetry. This inability to contain poetry supports the notion that, in its very essence and procedures, poetry tends toward confusion: diffusion, suffusion, and spreading. These analogies thus demonstrate confusion as poetry's operation.

Beyond their individual meanings, the images lack collective coherence. The Poet mixes images of poetry as a gown that, perhaps, spills from its spool, then as a self-nourishing flame of inspiration, then as an unrestrained current. Trying to uncover the feature of poetry that the Poet means to illuminate with this hodgepodge of analogies—

²³⁴ William Shakespeare, *Mr. VVilliam Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies* (London, 1623), Gg1v, <https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/FOLGERCM1~6~6>.

what a gown, a flame, and a current have in common—stumps the reader until she realizes that it is not how they are alike or different but rather their collectivity as a confusion that matters. The Poet’s theorization of poetry is itself a confusion, formed by combining a series of analogies, none of whose components—a gown, flame, and current—look like one another in any physical sense. Thus, summarizing the Poet’s theory by saying poetry *resembles* any of these would be incomplete. The Poet’s description, therefore, exemplifies the play’s poetics: creation by mingling unlike components into a thing whose identity hinges not on resemblance to any one part but on the *combination* of parts. Together and individually, these analogies insinuate the play’s departure from a theory of mimesis rooted in likeness to or difference from a referent.

As much as we might want to rejoice having discovered—and so early on—the character who vocalizes the play’s confused poetics, the Poet is clearly a target of ridicule. Observe the context in which the Poet philosophizes. Before the Poet’s enigmatic theory of poetry, Shakespeare gives us a taste of the Poet’s art, a few verses recited apparently “to himself” (SD 1.1.16):

When we for recompense have praised the vile,
It stains the glory in that happy verse
Which aptly sings the good. (1.1.16-8)

In fairness, the Poet seems in the middle of composing a worthwhile aphorism which warns his colleagues not to cheapen the glory of poetry by praising something vile just for compensation. However, this absent-minded musing interrupts a busy scene. A Merchant and Jeweller are conversing about which gifts Timon might accept, but the Poet just drifts off—in the way someone might pretend to drift off if he wants attention. The Painter takes the bait and asks the Poet what has captivated him, to which the Poet replies

with his theory of poetry. In context, not only does the Poet seem tremendously narcissistic, but also his theory, with its multiple and inscrutable metaphors, is considerably less elegant than his first dictum that the poet should not praise vile things for recompense. Indeed, the inelegance of his definition, three metaphors in five lines, indicates a lack of decorum or an inability to control his language, a sin which rhetoricians and literary critics from Aristotle to Puttenham would surely condemn.²³⁵ Clearly, the Poet intends to impress the Painter; he may intend to show off his ability to condense a description of something much more esteemed authors before him (ones at least dignified with a name) have spent thousands of words attempting to theorize, or maybe he is trying to add a bit of metaphorical flourish to a project Sidney, Puttenham, Carew, and more carry out with a sometimes-clinical attitude. In any case, he looks like a gadfly, not the impressive scholar he performs.

A subtler mark of Shakespeare's mockery is what the Poet tries to do. In one light, mixing disparate analogies actualizes the play's confused poetics, but the Poet clearly thinks that his combination of metaphors constitutes a stable *definition* of poetry. As far as the Poet is concerned, he has captured and contained the thing he, paradoxically, insists flies its bounds. But, ironically, both his images and the conjunction of images reveals this is a futile task. We cannot, then, identify the Poet as the mouthpiece for Shakespeare and Middleton's theory of poetry because he clearly isn't conscious that he has actualized this theory. The Poet doesn't realize that he attempts to define something that apparently resists a clear and singular definition. Thus, while the images he presents of poetry as confused (and, in fact, the confusion of these images)

²³⁵ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1405^a, where Aristotle demands that metaphors must provide clarity and "be fitting." See also Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, 221-2, 238-240, 262-266.

coincide with the theory the play develops, the facts that, first, the Poet doesn't realize that trying to define poetry is antithetical to this theory and, second, that his meditation is so clumsy turn him into an object of ridicule.

Other objects of the playwright's derision are critics who stretch to make meaning of the Poet's definition by emending its images, instead of appreciating them as confused. Fixing the lines opens critics to being chastened, first, because they work so hard to recuperate a satirized character and, second, because they force the play to conform to the very principles it opposes: clarity and order. In an attempt to salvage the Poet's meaning, Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson emended the lines to what many modern editions reproduce today. Pope changed "gown" to "gum" and "uses" to "issues," which Johnson further corrected to "oozes" so that the second line reads, "Our poesy is a gum which oozes." How ironic that, in trying to clarify the line, critics accentuate its image of diffusion and spreading out. Nevertheless, and chasing some kind of coherence, modern critics fabricate contexts in which the line would make sense. For example, the most recent Arden editors favor the emended phrase, "gum which oozes," because it is easy to reconcile with "From whence 'tis nourisht" as "Pope's *gum* (=sap) issuing or 'oozing' from a tree fits the context rather well."²³⁶ Providing the tree themselves, they attempt to fix the Poet's nonsense and thus detract from Shakespeare's derision of the self-confidently erudite Poet. A more conservative reader, Hugh Grady only modernizes "vses" to "uses" and explains that

...the emphasis is on poetry as a kind of use-value, perhaps even a commodity, which can wear out through use, like a gown which, as it is repeatedly worn, frays and thins. The poem, we are told, 'slipp'd idly from me,' and this verb is more consistent with the image of a loosely worn gown slipping off its wearer than with gum oozing from

²³⁶ Shakespeare and Middleton, *Timon of Athens*, ed. Dawson and Minton, 161n.22

a plant.²³⁷

It's worth considering: would we work so hard to decipher this image if it didn't contain that all-important word, "poetry"? Working so hard to decipher the image makes one seem as if they don't fully realize that Shakespeare ridicules the artisans. While Pope's, Johnson's, and modern editors' emendations rein in this image so that we can at least better understand the metaphysical conceit, the choice to have the Poet voice this image and its companions persuades us that these metaphysical conceits can't be read with the same straightforward seriousness as Donne's metaphysical conceits. This situation is more complicated: these images very much illustrate confusion and the play's confused poetics, while the play ridicules the character who voices them.

Metaphysical conceit also plays a key role in the satire and confusion created in the next movement of this conversation, the ensuing *paragone* debate with the Painter. The more the Poet talks, the more rhetorically indecorous and manic he becomes, developments that emphasize that he is not to be admired. The Painter, by contrast, feigns modesty and indifference, calling his own work just, "A picture" and merely "good" and "indifferent" (1.1.27, 29, 31). The Painter's modesty appears to goad the Poet, who—perhaps to show off or to intimidate the Painter with his verbal prowess—effuses praise upon the Painter's work, a portrait of Timon.

Admirable! How this grace
Speaks his own standing! What a mental power
This eye shoots forth! How big imagination
Moves in this lip! To th' dumbness of the gesture
One might interpret. (1.1.31-35)

As in his definition of poetry, the Poet's thoughts are nearly inscrutable; if not for the

²³⁷ Hugh Grady, *Shakespeare and Impure Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 108.

initial “Admirable!” and proliferation of exclamation points, suggesting we read the same sentiment across sentences with the same punctuation, we might not know that the Poet means to compliment the Painter. His compliments are opaque, in part, because he delivers them as metaphysical conceits, which, we will remember, was derided for its “*discordia*” by the great seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literary critics, Ben Jonson, William Drummond, William Dryden, and Samuel Johnson. The explosion of metaphysical conceits—grace speaking standing, mental power shooting forth from an eye, imagination moving in a fixed lip—makes the Poet contemptible to the aforementioned elite and influential poets; he is definitely not the kind of poet others would normally strive to emulate. Unexpectedly, however, the metaphysical conceits make him exactly Shakespeare and Middleton’s type. The device that forces discordant elements into a relationship is perfect for a confused poetics. Yet, the Poet’s unbridled enthusiasm, especially in contrast to the Painter’s more measured attitude, nags the reader not to forget how pompous yet obtuse the Poet has been. Indeed, in this moment Shakespeare fashions the Poet into his own little confusion: the Poet implements a literary device that suits the play’s poetics perfectly and makes him look like a champion of a confused poetics, but he is also obsequious, narcissistic, thick, and grating. The Poet himself is a representation of confusion, a mixture of discordant elements.

While a confused Poet might prompt the reader’s own momentary epistemological confusion with regard to whether she should treat this character as a fool or a prophet, the *paragone*’s climax reveals the Poet’s allegiance to the very principles of poetry the play challenges. This allegiance secures him as an object of mockery. The Painter responds to the Poet’s fawning with relaxation, “It is a pretty mocking of the

life,” meaning that he thinks his painting is a pretty imitation of Timon’s vitality.²³⁸ But he also insinuates that the Poet has not completed his job: “Here is a touch—is’t good?” he provokes, probably with feigned disinterest (1.1.36-7). Probably so hungry for a compliment of *his* compliments, the Poet crafts his most attention-seeking response (a couplet no less!):

It tutors nature; artificial strife
Lives in these touches livelier than life. (1.1.38-9)

Notice, first, that the Poet measures the painting’s tutoring of nature (its improvement upon nature) with resemblance in mind—the painting is “livelier than life.”²³⁹ The fact that Shakespeare puts this approbation in the *Poet*’s mouth is reason enough to see it as problematic. But it is also an approbation for art that imitates by resembling. These two things together indicate that Shakespeare is critiquing artistic imitation that is rooted in resemblance. By putting this praise in the Poet’s mouth, Shakespeare insinuates that resemblance is not art’s appropriate mimetic procedure, just as resemblance is not appropriate for imitating life. Second, the echo of da Vinci is impossible to miss: art should “represent Nature in such a way as to be able to assume the appearance of its identity, even surpassing it in naturalness.” This is, then, the perfect climax to a *paragone*, a debate founded on the principle that art resembles, even should strive to surpass, nature. Thus, it is also the perfect climax to a mockery of this debate. The Poet’s explosion into a couplet, one of the most conspicuous poetic devices, underscores his desire to be identified as a typical poet, who would also likely tenaciously hold the tenets

²³⁸ On “mocking” and “life” in this line, see Shakespeare and Middleton, *Timon of Athens*, ed. Dawson and Minton, 163n.36 and 38-9.

²³⁹ For the gloss of “tutors” as “improves upon,” see Shakespeare and Middleton, *Timon of Athens*, ed. Dawson and Minton, 163n.38.

of the *paragone*—as Jonson and the artists in Lyly’s *Entertainment* do. At the same time the couplet, both in its meaning and form, exemplifies the exact conventionality the play opposes.

A number of scholars have read this point in the debate, and the Poet’s retort in which he details his own poetic representation of Timon, as a nod to the emblem tradition.²⁴⁰ An emblem works to clearly disclose a universal truth to its reader. However, Michael Leslie and others have read the play’s combination of word and image as an *impresa*, whose purpose is “to conceal, not reveal, to cloak its meaning from all but the most appropriate of readers.”²⁴¹ An *impresa* requires the observer to work out the connection between word and image because their relationship is not apparent: “The onlooker is provided with a series of ‘figures’ and mottoes; but...the crucial relationships between these elements are omitted.”²⁴² At first glance, the image and word appear randomly mixed together. Perhaps the elements tell a story that doesn’t seem relevant to or congruent with reality. Leslie argues that the Poet’s piece, which “frame[s]” (1.1.70) Timon climbing up Fortune’s hill on the backs of his supporters only to be spurned by her and allowed to fall unaided, and the Painter’s

thousand moral paintings
 ...That shall demonstrate these quick blows of Fortune’s
 More pregnantly than words (1.1.92-4)

²⁴⁰ Shakespeare and Middleton, *Timon of Athens*, ed. Dawson and Minton, 95-6.

Emblems, combinations of word and image, have been of particular interest to scholars fascinated by the *ut pictura poesis* analogy. Until the late twentieth century, the explicit comparison in the phrase led literary scholars to conclude that whenever they encountered combinations of visual and rhetorical elements, word and image worked harmoniously to deliver a clear message.

²⁴¹ Michael Leslie, “The Dialogue Between Bodies and Souls: Pictures and Poesy in the English Renaissance,” *Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry* 1 (1985): 24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02666286.1985.10435665>. On the readability of the emblem, see Henri Estienne, *The Art of Making Devises*, trans. Thomas Blount (London, 1646); Henry Peacham, *Compleat Gentleman* (Amsterdam/New York: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum/Da Capo, 1968), 105.

²⁴² Leslie, “The Dialogue Between Body and Souls,” 25.

function together as a warning *impresa* that Timon neglects to see or understand because he ultimately cannot work out that the poem and painting refer to him; his own situation connects them.²⁴³ In a slightly different reading of this *impresa*, John Dixon Hunt places the burden of interpretation on the audience, not on Timon. For Hunt, the competition between the Poet and Painter to each more faithfully render Timon's situation before the audience even meets the character suggests the play's "interest in competing or collaborative modes of representing character in action." The *impresa*, according to Hunt, is a form of competition—"riddling, individualizing, and with word independent of, even tensed against, image," lacking "explicit connections between constituent parts."²⁴⁴ Hunt's and Leslie's interpretations of the *impresa* align with the play's ethic of confusion: parts are joined together through mixing, mingling, and blending without regard for, or explanation of, affinities or congruence.

Timon's tragic flaw is that he wants his world to operate according to the logic of the *paragone* even if it actually tends toward the logic of the *impresa*. Instead of recognizing that his so-called friends' sycophantic exteriors may contrast their interior motives and feelings, he lends them money and rescues them from peril as if their gratitude reflects true feelings of loyalty and respect. This is ironic because he knows, intellectually at least, that man deceives. Praising the Painter for his work, Timon accepts it with:

Painting is welcome.
The painting is almost the natural man,
For since dishonour traffics with man's nature,

²⁴³ Leslie, "The Dialogue Between Body and Souls," 29.

²⁴⁴ John Dixon Hunt, "Shakespeare and the *Paragone*: A Reading of *Timon of Athens*," in *Images of Shakespeare: Proceedings of the Third Congress of the International Shakespeare Association, 1986*, ed. Werner Habicht, D.J. Palmer, and Roger Pringle (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1988), 51. Hunt goes so far as to argue that the play actually contrasts visual and verbal, thus subverting the analogic claim of *ut pictura poesis* (52).

He is but outside; these pencilled figures are
Even such as they give out. (1.1.160-4)

The second line indicates Timon's *paragone*-like attitude, that painting should strive to resemble or assume the appearance of "natural man," who, it becomes clear, is not real-life man. Real-life man, corrupted by daily life and displaying a false, friendly exterior unmatched by his dishonorable interior, is more like an *impresa*—with a puzzling dissimilarity between inside and outside. Contrasting the painting's "pencilled figures" with real man, who is "but outside"—his façade does not guarantee anything about his interior feelings—Timon praises and prefers the painting's superior figures who are "Even such as they give out," internally and externally consistent. Thus, he appreciates the painting for striving to surpass real man by resembling man in his natural, ideal state where his outside reflects his inside. However, this commitment to likeness, and thinking that art imitates by resembling, is exactly what Shakespeare has been ridiculing in this long scene.

Shakespeare's derision of those, including Timon, who treat art as if it strives to resemble, and therefore maintain a somewhat predictable order, manifests one critic's reading that the play theorizes art acquiring a transformative and creative power that unravels "the divinely ordered scheme."²⁴⁵ The mockery of the *paragone* and substituting confusion for likeness as a poetic procedure suggest that order and clarity are neither principles of art nor of the ethics and conditions for living the play theorizes and represents. This Athens tends toward disorder. The Poet's analogies developing and demonstrating confusion prime the audience for what exactly that disorder will look

²⁴⁵ Susan Handleman, "Timon of Athens: The Rage of Disillusion," *American Imago* 36, no. 1 (1979): 45-68, esp. 55, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26303357>.

like—mixing, mingling, diffusing. They also insist that confusion, not resemblance and order, are the play’s poetic procedure and aesthetic. All of this means that Timon’s imprudent *paragone*-like attitude, which makes him covet clarity in art and an ideal world where his friends’ seeming matches their being, marks the beginning of a tragedy because his philosophy of life does not match the conditions of his reality where disorder and confusion reign.

An Ethics of Confusion

Timon expects that order and resemblance are principles of art, as well as of the ethics that undergirds Athenian life. Indeed, before he self-exiles, he stakes his livelihood on being able to predict future behaviors from previous ones—that what will resemble what is or was. This belief manifests as his misguided interpretation and practice of exchange as continuous and reciprocal gift-giving, instead of as discrete instances of interest-accruing loans.²⁴⁶ In reality, the Athenian economy does not depend on the replication of previous behaviors. Yet Timon seems to operate as if he lives in a gift-economy underwritten by friendship, which ensures continued beneficence; if he gives,

²⁴⁶ Kolb’s analysis that Timon “seeks to create a confluence [of inner and outer, being and seeming] using gifts and hospitality” indicates that his wariness of real-life man does not inform his financial decisions—or that he desperately and naively wants a friendship economy to flourish even though he knows real-life man never is as he seems. See Kolb, “Debt’s Poetry,” 415.

For explorations of *Timon*’s financial system, see Michael Chorost, “Biological Finance in Shakespeare’s *Timon of Athens*,” *English Literary Renaissance* 21, no. 3 (1991): 349-70, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6757.1991.tb00743.x>; Ken Jackson, “‘One Wish’ or the Possibility of the Impossible: Derrida, the Gift, and God in *Timon of Athens*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (2001): 34-66, <https://doi.org/10.1353/shq.2001.0009>; Karl Marx, “*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*: Selections,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1972), 80-1; Coppélia Kahn, “‘Magic of bounty’: *Timon of Athens*, Jacobean Patronage, and Maternal Power,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38, no.1 (1987): 34-57, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2870400>.

they will return in kind, which will allow him to reciprocate, and so on.²⁴⁷ This he pontificates when a lord who receives his favor insists, “Might we but have that happiness, my lord, that you would once use our hearts, whereby we might express some part of our zeals” (1.2.83-85). Timon responds,

...my good friends, but the gods themselves have provided that I shall have much help from you—how had you been my friends else?...O you gods, think I, what need we have any friends, if we should ne’er have need of ’em?...Why, I have often wished myself poorer that I might come nearer to you. We are born to do benefits... (1.2.86-100)

According to Timon, financial health and ability to give gifts is a boon of friendship and reciprocity. Deeply Senecan, Timon codifies exchange as “benefits,” which Seneca defines as, “doynge of good turnes.”²⁴⁸ In lending to his friends, therefore, Timon considers only “the faithfulness of the receyver,” whose faith will be expressed in reciprocity.²⁴⁹ When he claims that “the gods themselves have provided that I shall have much help from you” he insinuates that past experiences secure his trust in reciprocity; his friends will help him because he has helped them because they have helped him.²⁵⁰

This cycle of reciprocity has strict conditions of equivalence, however. Much like

²⁴⁷ See Kahn, “‘Magic of bounty,’” esp. 48-9. As Kahn suggests, Marcel Mauss’ gift theory—wherein gift-giving obligates the receiver to reciprocate—best describes Timon’s perspective; although, Timon’s belief that the sole basis of his economic health is friendship-driven gift-giving adds an additional tragedy. See Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Studies*, trans. W.D. Halls (New York: Routledge, 1990).

²⁴⁸ Arthur Golding, “To the Right honorable Sir Christopher Hutton Knight,” in *The vvorke of the excellent Philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca concerning Benefyting, that is too say to the dooing, receyving, and requyting of good Turnes*, by Seneca, trans. Arthur Golding (London, 1578), ii^r.

²⁴⁹ Seneca, *Benefyting*, III.xiii, sig. 34^v.

See also Kolb, “Debt’s Poetry,” 401-2: “the playwrights graft contemporary forms of economic and affective entanglement onto an older, yet still culturally relevant model of sociability based on reciprocal gift-giving and hospitality.”

²⁵⁰ This example suggests that, applying Derrida’s gift theory, Ken Jackson slightly over-reads Timon’s generosity. Unlike Derrida’s theory of the gift as that which is given without “reciprocity, return, exchange, counter-gift, or debt,” Timon expects reciprocity; he does not try to “mov[e] outside the circular economy of exchange.” See Jackson, “‘One Wish’ or the Possibility of the Impossible,” 39-40 and 47; and Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 12.

the expectation that art strives to equal, to assume the identity of, the thing it represents, gifts must match what has been given previously. Timon expresses this principle in a discussion with one of his client-friends, Ventidius. The beneficent Lord frames his hearty acquiescence to pay off Ventidius' debts as an act of friendship, a response to a need:

I am not of that feather to shake off
My friend when he needs me most. (1.1.103-4)

Though Timon asks for nothing in return, his theory suggests that he can expect Ventidius' commensurate help if he ever needs it. Instead, Ventidius repays him the fee, "[d]oubled with thanks and service" (1.2.6), to which Timon responds,

O, by no means,
Honest Ventidius, you mistake my love:
I gave it freely ever, and there's none
Can truly say he gives if he receives. (1.2.8-11)

Timon demurs from this payment not because Ventidius reciprocates but because Ventidius repays *more* than Timon gave him. This interaction reveals the difference between Timon's friendship economy—where exchange guarantees future exchange—and the reality of Athens' loan economy, where every exchange expects interest and the clearance of debt. Before entering Timon's first banquet, one Lord identifies the Athenian perspective that one feels obligated to repay Timon's gifts with a near-impossible amount of interest: there is

no gift to him,
But breeds the giver a return exceeding
All use of quittance. (1.2.285-7)

The Lord laments that he feels it is almost impossible to exceed Timon's generosity and thus be freed from the exchange. Despite this Lord's feelings, in the friendship economy

Timon believes in, gifts or deeds are repaid one-to-one. Tragically, pre-exile, Timon chooses to believe that friendship, a play of tailored reciprocity, supersedes the rules of Athens' economy. He mistakes exchange or loan for gift-giving, which makes him see Athens' economy not necessarily as a financial system but as something that primarily ensures an ethical order, where past generosity implies a similar future generosity.

When Timon's creditors come calling, he confidently sends his servants to ask for benefits from those with whom he has shared this reciprocity. To his most trusted servant, Flavius, he assures:

Canst thou the conscience lack
To think I shall lack friends? Secure thy heart—
If I would broach the vessels of my love
And try the argument by borrowing,
Men and men's fortunes could I frankly use
As I can bid thee speak. (2.2.175-180)

Again, Timon bases his financial security on an expectation that he can depend on using friends as they have used him. However, the response from one of his supposed friends, Lucullus, reveals that Athenian society is not the reciprocity-paradise Timon has imagined. After initially becoming excited for "A gift, I warrant" (3.1.5), Lucullus quickly changes his tune when Timon's servant asks for fifty talents. Lucullus refuses by admonishing the servant, "Many a time and often I ha' dined with him, and told him on't, and come again to supper to him of purpose to have him spend less, and yet he would embrace no counsel, take no warning by my coming" (3.1.24-8).²⁵¹ Lucullus' response reveals a misalignment between the conditions Timon has fabricated—that he will always

²⁵¹ Kolb connects this whiplash to Timon's susceptibility to "paradiastolic redescription." Diametrically opposed re-interpretations of his behavior as generously hospitable, at first, and then as "raging waste" (Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens*, 2.1.4) later in the play indicate how important *perception* of Timon's financial health is to his actual financial health. Kolb goes as far as to analyze Timon as "made and unmade in language." See Kolb, "Debt's Poetry," esp. 402-405 and 408.

have the support he needs if he supports others—and the reality that past transactions do not guarantee future ones. This situation clarifies that not just in his artistic preferences but in his ethics, his approach to civic life, Timon believes that processes that replicate behaviors and maintain stability (in this case, his own financial stability), uphold society. Such structure and order is certainly antithetical to the play's theory of poesy, which eschews replicating a predecessor. Likewise, his fellow Athenians' responses demonstrate that the proper functioning of Athens does not necessarily require the replication of behaviors, but, in fact, sometimes necessitates a devastating deviation from past behaviors. That is, in refusing to assist Timon, his fellow Athenians critique and correct Timon's way of living that strives to preserve what is or was.

The rebuke of Timon's ethics, which values stability and expects consistency of behavior, does not in itself theorize an appropriate ethics—let alone an ethics of confusion—to match the conditions for living in this society. Yet, in the same way that the first scene with the Poet and Painter reveals the play's confused poetics, the Athenians' treatment and characterization of Timon during his financial prime and subsequent crisis reveal the values of this fickle society. For example, in the same way that the Poet appears, himself, like a confusion—in his case, a satirized persona who nevertheless vocalizes the play's poetics—Timon's fair-weather friends swing from pledging their loyalty in response to his generosity to instantaneously rejecting him once his coffers run dry to once again looking forward to “taste” him when they are misled to believe he has replenished his wealth (3.2.80). This mingling of contrasting behaviors suggests an ethical tendency towards confusion.

An even more intense signal of Athens' ethics of confusion emanates from the

oft-repeated word “bounty.” Used more times in this play than in any other by Shakespeare (used more times, in fact, than “confusion” and “confound”) “bounty” is used exclusively to remind the reader of Timon’s function in this society—as the unceasing font of benefits. “Bounty” and “Timon” are almost interchangeable, as two instances of metonymy demonstrate. Mere moments into the play, the Poet appears to pay homage to some god of bounty:

Magic of bounty, all these spirits thy power
Hath conjured to attend. (1.1.4-7)

However, the figure being revered as a conjurer of attendants is, in fact, Timon. This becomes clear only in retrospect, such as when his loyal servant Flavius laments the emptiness of Timon’s coffers by referring to him by his predominating characteristic: “’Tis pity bounty had not eyes behind” (1.2.164). In another clarifying instance, a lord praises Timon for being “the very soul of bounty” (1.2.213); several lines later a guest at Timon’s banquet encourages another to follow him in with, “Come, shall we in and taste Lord Timon’s bounty?” (1.2.281). Even in the late stages of the play, after Athens has forsaken him, Timon retains this label when a prostitute pleads suggestively with him, “More counsel with more money, bounteous Timon!” (4.3.166). “Bounty” is a perfect word to accompany a person who gives liberally and indiscriminately.²⁵² However, the play attaches other connotations to this word which signal its work as a handmaid to confusion.

While typically, and certainly in our common parlance, “confusion” signifies

²⁵² “bounty, n.,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2018, <http://www.oed.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/Entry/22084?redirectedFrom=bounty>. Definitions 4a, “Goodness shown in giving, gracious liberality, munificence: usually attributed to God, or to the great and wealthy, who have it in their power to give largely and liberally,” and 4b, “An act of generosity, a thing generously bestowed; a boon, gift, gratuity.”

mixing and mingling, the Latin etymology of the word also suggests diffusion and spreading.²⁵³ These less common meanings enable us to see how images of Timon as bountiful develop the play's ethic of confusion. The images figure him as both financially and corporeally limitless. The first time the Poet uses "bounty," the Merchant chimes in to praise the still-unnamed "worthy lord" (1.1.9):

A most incomparable man, breathed as it were
To an untireable and continue goodness –
He passes. (1.1.10-12)

Trying to decipher who is the lord in question and what they are actually like, the reader has a strange family of descriptions for a person, some descriptions almost unbelievable—bounty, worthy, incomparable, untireable²⁵⁴, continue²⁵⁵, and surpasses. These latter four qualify the bounteousness of Timon. Strangely, they portray the character so magnanimously that he surpasses and cannot be compared to any other. This makes him, to echo Dawson, somehow on the outer edge of what a person should or could be. "Untireable" and "continue" accentuate the super-humanness of this man, figuring him as somehow limitless, present all through Athens.

The Merchant's image includes a somatic aspect as well, suggesting there is no end to Timon: he is extending (and extended) beyond not just his financial means but also beyond the integrity of an individualized body. The Merchant imagines Timon as

²⁵³ See note 199 above.

²⁵⁴ Meaning, "tireless." The first recorded usage of the word is from 1607 and occurs no place else in Shakespeare's works. See Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens*, ed. Dawson and Minton, 160n.11.

²⁵⁵ Meaning, "long continued." Dawson and Minton reckon this is the first usage of this rare word in this particular sense, though it also occurs in *Othello*. Cassio says to Bianca:

Pardon me, Bianca,
I have this while with leaden thoughts been pressed,
But I shall in a more continue time
Strike off this score of absence. (3.4.176-9)

Cassio means, "uninterrupted; long-continued." See William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. E.A.J. Honigmann (London: Arden Shakespeare, 1999), 252n.178, and Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens*, ed. Dawson and Minton, 160n.11.

“breathed” to this limitless goodness. Editors have glossed “breathed” in ways that highlight a corporeal dimension of his bounty: he is “enured by constant practice” or “‘trained’, as applied, for example, to horses” through exercise.²⁵⁶ One can also read a Biblical echo from John 20:22, “And when he said that, he breathed on them, and said, Receive the holy Ghost.”²⁵⁷ However, rather than indicating Timon as a Christ-like figure, breathing goodness or the Holy Spirit on his disciples, the unusual phrase, “breathed...to,” suggests it makes better sense to take Timon as a disciple—filled up, animated, or alive with the spirit of goodness which makes him surpass all others in generosity.²⁵⁸ In this reading, his pervasiveness and inability to be exhausted are indications both of how his community treats him and of how it imagines him corporeally. Timon’s peers think of him as something that can be endlessly diffused through society. Indeed, the Poet will say later that all Athenians

through him
Drink the free air

as if his beneficence, and the body that conducts it, are ubiquitous, diffused throughout the world, and available to all (1.1.83-4).

As the play reaches the height of Timon’s financial crisis, the discussion of his bounty portrays him as confused not just in the sense of being diffused through society or limitless, like the current of poetry. He is also portrayed as physically and brutally mixed with others; his body can actually be spread throughout Athens by being compounded

²⁵⁶ Shakespeare and Middleton, *Timon of Athens*, ed. Dawson and Minton, 160n.10. Johnson originated these glosses.

²⁵⁷ *Geneva Bible*, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+20%3A22&version=GNV> (Accessed July 1, 2018).

²⁵⁸ “breathe, v.,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2018, <http://www.oed.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/Entry/22974?rskey=N7acgj&result=1&isAdvanced=false>. Definitions 4c and d.

with others' bodies. His prudent servant Flavius claims that he has often exclaimed,

‘the bounty of this lord!
How many prodigal bits have slave and peasants
This night englutted? Who is not Timon’s,
What heart, head, sword, force, means, but is Lord Timon’s?’
(2.2.164-7)²⁵⁹

This worry incorporates both processes of confusion the play dramatizes—diffusion and mixture. Timon’s unlimited and indiscriminate generosity makes him present all throughout Athens in the hearts, heads, swords, force, and means of his beneficiaries. Yet the way Timon is distributed borders on horrifying. Flavius figures Timon’s bounty as ingested and digested, mixed into the bodies of other Athenians. In fact, the insinuation all along that “Timon” and “bounty” are interchangeable ways of referring to the same figure here makes Timon, himself, seem constitutive of, or sharing the physical heart and head of, his fellow Athenians who have ingested him. Such a gruesome image makes it impossible to ignore the violent and destructive ways Athenians treat one another, exemplified, too, by their disposition to alternately leech on and neglect Timon. Not only does characterizing and treating Timon as confused realize the ethical tendencies of Athens, but the vivid descriptions of Timon diffused and mixed portrays what it actually looks like to live confused.

“Let confusion live”

When Timon, bankrupt and fed up with his peers’ greed and abandonment, self-

²⁵⁹ Kolb’s analysis of a different moment in the play—where Timon toasts his fair-weather friends with, “I drink to you” (1.2.104)—both feels apt and takes on a gorier significance here. “Timon offers a vision of the gathered company as the inhabitants of a new golden age, where *meum* merges with *tuum* and all things are held in common.” Kolb, “Debt’s Poetry,” 414.

exiles beyond the walls of Athens, he becomes the spokesperson and chief advocate for the kind of confusion he has witnessed in his fellow Athenians' ethics. For the rest of the play he seeks to conjure and instill confusion in the conditions for living and as an attribute of life itself—with binaries, hierarchies and categories scrambled. His rubric for life manifests the play's satiric disorder of everything from ethics to politics to the somatic and essential characteristics of the human person.

His first wish reflects a desire to frustrate any attempt to polarize Athenian life and life beyond the walls when he implores the walls to

dive in the earth
And fence not Athens! (4.1.2-3)

Calling for the walls to retract, Timon sets the stage for confusion, the mixing and mingling, of Athens and the uncultivated landscape outside its walls. Unfortunately for Timon, his wish comes true because he is almost immediately, and then constantly, beset with Athenian visitors, many of whom have come for the gold the earth has cruelly offered him instead of the roots for which he digs.

However, scholars have a hard time seeing Athens and the world outside it as confused—mixed and mingled—rather than opposed, in part because they neglect the complexity of the word, “confusion.” On the one hand, generations of editors have insisted that “confusion” and “confound” are synonymous with “destruction,” “perdition,” and “ruin.”²⁶⁰ Basing their glosses on colloquial use rather than on etymology, they miss an opportunity to see the nuance in what Timon proposes, mixing

²⁶⁰ Shakespeare and Middleton, *Timon of Athens*, ed. Dawson and Minton, 266n.20; William Shakespeare and Thomas Middleton, *The Life of Timon of Athens*, ed. John Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 185n.240; William Shakespeare, *The Life of Timon of Athens*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 1496n.237.

instead of destruction and ruin. On the other hand, even readings that recognize the analytical value of the play's "scrambling" and "disorientation" (of the reader's hermeneutic and the sense of "self") base this assessment on oppositions in the play.²⁶¹ This is James Kuzner's approach to *Timon of Athens*, a play that makes the reader "look two ways at once" when it comes to any political, ethical, or aesthetic morals we might take from it because it frustrates attempts to privilege one alternative over another.²⁶² For example, Kuzner argues that the bounded (with perhaps a pun on "bonded") life in Athens is just as unpalatable (to both Timon and the audience) as Timon's experience as "sovereign man," who "stops thinking in terms of separations between subject and object, self and world...just the opposite of bounded selfhood."²⁶³ I certainly concur with Kuzner's assessment of life outside the walls, especially insofar as he recognizes the razing of boundaries between categories so to allow mixture of seeming opposites; however, I do not agree with Kuzner's larger conclusion that the play is binate, "present[ing] a pair of worlds at odds with each other."²⁶⁴ Strangely, Kuzner initially posits that this binarism shows Shakespeare as "confused," but he quickly dismisses it as "the wrong term for describ[ing] the play's economies" without a thought for the exceptional number of times the word occurs in the play or the flexibility of its meaning.²⁶⁵ Though Kuzner is marginally more aware than others of the term's

²⁶¹ James Kuzner, *Shakespeare as a Way of Life: Skeptical Practice and the Politics of Weakness* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 143, 145.

²⁶² Kuzner, *Shakespeare as a Way of Life*, 145. See also Richard Fly, "Cofounding Contraries: *Timon of Athens*," in *Shakespeare's Mediated World* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1976), 119-42, which argues that *Timon* lacks any sense of mediation, in both content and form. It displays a world without "compromise, modulation, subordination, and continuity," replaced by "stark oppositions, and abrupt noncommunicative contrasts and by disturbing disjunctions and harsh antitheses" (124-5).

²⁶³ Kuzner, *Shakespeare as a Way of Life*, 150.

²⁶⁴ Kuzner, *Shakespeare as a Way of Life*, 154.

²⁶⁵ Kuzner, *Shakespeare as a Way of Life*, 154.

complexity—he insinuates that “confusion” might have something other than negative valences when he writes “*if* it carries negative valences”—he doesn’t address the fact that confusion is first a condition of order before it is a frustrating feeling.²⁶⁶ Thus, he doesn’t see confusion as a rubric for poetry and for liveliness in the play.

We can view scholars’ opposition of the two worlds and the Poet, Painter, and Timon’s likeness-based theory of art as variations of the same assumption: that relationality is a function of likeness or difference. It’s this convention the play is trying to trouble. The repetition of “confusion” and “confound” are meant, at once, to make us see that intention and to indicate an alternative approach to describing relationships, one that focuses on objects’ composition and *how* they are composed rather than on their heritage or their likeness to and difference from other things.

Shakespeare and Middleton manifest this alternative with both words that evoke images of confusion and literal displays of it. For example, we’ve already seen how calling Timon “untireable” and “continue” figures him, from the play’s outset, as confused because it treats him as diffusible and omnipresent. “Confound” appears for the first time in the play in the beginning stages of what will evolve into a confusion of banquet, entertainment, bazar, and audience during which Timon hears and redresses grievances. Timon uses “confusion” and “confound” more times than any other character, but it is used first by the play’s unwavering cynic, Apemantus, who hurls it in a curse for the Merchant’s trade to “confound” him (1.1.241, 243). Granted, we do not have sufficient context to interpret Apemantus’s curse as anything more specific than a wish for the Merchant to come into some bad fortune—that is, we can’t say whether

²⁶⁶ Kuzner, *Shakespeare as a Way of Life*, 154, emphasis added.

Apemantus means for the Merchant or his goods to be mixed or diffused, specifically. However, in this context “confound” serves double duty as a curse and as a primer to prepare the audience for what they are about to see: characters, all magnetized to Timon, mingle together with different attitudes and motives. Indeed, Apemantus is the play’s Arruntius, watching and narrating a confusion, a hodgepodge, of unsympathetic and condescending artisans and lords who surround Timon.²⁶⁷ There are the peddling artisans, the Poet, Painter, Merchant, and Jeweller, buzzing around Timon hoping for some patronage; innumerable lords who, less obviously, are hoping for the same delighting generosity; Timon’s one worried servant; the son of a recently deceased man who comes to re-pay what his father borrowed from Timon; Alcibiades, a soldier who thanks Timon for unknown assistance (and who will seek it again under much less peaceful conditions); entertainers come to perform a masque; and an Old Athenian to whom Timon pays a bride-price so his servant can marry the Athenian’s daughter. The sheer number and diversity of motives accentuates the lack of a shared basic quality; nothing relates or organizes these characters to one another but their target, Timon.

Apemantus nurtures the play’s ethic and aesthetic by accosting and chastising as many members of the scene as possible. Scorning the Painter’s, Poet’s, and Jeweller’s works, he highlights the bazar-like aspect of the scene; refusing Timon’s dinner invitation—“No, I eat not lords” (1.1.207)—he highlights the uncomfortable sense that Timon’s guests feast on him when they feast with him: “what a number of men eats Timon and he sees ’em not! It grieves me to see so many dip their meat in one man’s

²⁶⁷ Arruntius is the cynic and moralizer in Ben Jonson’s *Sejanus His Fall* (1603). He unmasks characters’ motivations for the audience and predicts the political turmoil (see especially 3.1). Jonson, *Sejanus His Fall*, in *Ben Jonson: The Devil is an Ass and Other Plays*, 103-222.

blood” (1.2.39-41). Apemantus’s lambasting of various guests emphasizes the diversity of plots and fuels the sense of the event as a confusion. Even more, interacting with nearly as many guests as Timon does, Apemantus begins to resemble Timon—Apemantus playing Timon’s cynical shadow-host. Likewise, when Fortune flings Timon off her wheel and he self-exiles, Timon begins transforming into Apemantus, joining him as a cynic by putting on the antic disposition of a misanthrope and later renaming himself “Misanthropos” (4.3.65). It is, therefore, fitting that Apemantus introduces the language of confusion and Timon copies his vocabulary.

Timon doesn’t just deploy the same vocabulary Apemantus uses, but when Timon invites confusion to live, he illustrates and clarifies one operation of confounding. Timon provides what looks initially like a list of abnormal behaviors that would bring society to a standstill, but, more accurately, his orders would produce the literal condition confusion describes. After inviting the walls around Athens to “dive in the earth”—an invitation for mingling and mixing between Athens and the outside wilderness—he continues with directions for unmistakably generative acts of mixing and spreading:

...Matrons, turn incontinent;
Obedience, fail in children; slaves and fools,
Pluck the grave wrinkled senate from the bench
And minister in their steads. To general filths
Convert o’th’ instant, green virginity,
Do’t in your parents’ eyes. (4.1.3-8)

Each instance is not an example of simply ruining or inhibiting the function of society by turning something over to its opposite, but rather Timon calls for kinds of proliferation. Married women become not sterile but rather promiscuous; delinquent children follow every impulse but obedience; slaves and fools take the position of senators and create a new world order; virgins become whores. He summarizes this operation in a climatic

they have been infected with the same viruses. Thus, Timon calls for the Athenians to share the same infected ways of life. Even infected, they are very much alive as the viruses require living vectors in order to propagate. The persistence of the disease is the mark of life. Timon also associates this pathology with growth: “Take thou that too, with multiplying bans” (4.1.34). “Multiplying bans” invokes the viruses’ primary objective: to persist and infect anything they can. Indeed, these viruses ignore class distinctions and social positions; they upset hierarchies, mingling men of all stations. In his new, confused world order, the diseased life-force that spreads among the citizens confuses them by mixing and mingling all Athenians with one another. The life he wishes Athenians’ to live, in fact, works hand-in-hand with disorder.

A perplexing rant to a thief demonstrates that Timon doesn’t just crave the conflation of Athens and its outside or the mingling of all social classes, but he also aims to unsettle others’ sense of themselves as unique individuals by insisting that “Each thing’s a thief” (4.3.437). As a unifying and constant characteristic, everything on the planet steals from everything else. Nature inherently tends toward confusing and ambiguating combination: the sun robs the sea; the moon “snatches from the sun”; the sea steals from the moon; the earth feeds on excrement; and, finally, he commands the thieves:

Rob one another—there’s more gold. Cut throats,
 All that you meet are thieves. To Athens go,
 Break open shops, nothing can you steal
 But thieves do lose it
 ...
 And gold confound you howsoe’er. Amen. (4.3.431-444)

Timon’s thesis is that all things and people steal from each other, assimilating others’ goods or capabilities into their own. Timon precipitates this confused life, where

everything takes from everything else, when he flings more gold at the thieves, rewarding them for pilfering and encouraging them to continue doing so. One of the thieves' response to this diatribe confirms Timon's persuasiveness: "He's almost charmed me from my profession by persuading me to it" (4.3.445-6). On the one hand, Timon's harping seems to have inspired self-awareness in a thief, a relief for an audience pummeled by disheartening behavior. On the other hand, we can read the thief's realization more cynically: there is no point in forsaking his profession because Timon's description has convinced him that confusion is normal: everything and everyone should be an amalgamation of stolen bits.

Thus, "confusion" does not just prescribe a kind of life and way of living that is like a disordering disease, but, as Timon uses it, "confusion" is also a potential condition of being human. The greatest irony of the play is that after Timon self-exiles because he is bankrupt and cannot find a way to pay his uncompromising creditors, the earth will not stop offering him gold. Word spreads of Timon's new fortune, and he begrudgingly starts to entertain visitors. To his first visitor, Alcibiades, a soldier exiled by the Athenian senate for arguing too passionately to save the life of a fellow soldier who committed murder, Timon willingly supplies gold for Alcibiades to take revenge on Athens—but with one condition. After he has

Ma[d]e large confusion and, thy fury spent,
Confounded be thyself. (4.3.127-8)

In this instance, confusion or confounding is not just something to see or make in the world, but Timon wishes it to be part of Alcibiades' human being. He wishes for Alcibiades to exist mixed and mingled with and diffused into other kinds of worldly beings.

This worldview is especially pronounced when Apemantus comes to visit. Timon continually figures his visitor in beastly terms, calling him in one instance, “thou issue of a mangy dog” (4.3.365).²⁶⁹ But, despite the insult, the two misanthropes discuss their shared philosophy and desire for Man to fall into a “confusion” (4.3.323). In fact, Apemantus signals this has already happened when he reports, “The commonwealth of Athens is become a forest of beasts” (4.3.346-7). This development figures the exact mixture of city and country—now to the point of indistinctness—that Timon prayed for when he commanded the wall around Athens to fall: the commonwealth has become a varied ecosystem that supports all kinds of competing life-forms, including and especially predatory beasts which the Athenians were clearly becoming in Timon’s early dealings with them. Alongside the mixture of city and country, the constant figurations in this scene of men as animals and beasts and the confirmation that Athens has become a forest of beasts-in-men’s-bodies suggests that confusion of man and animal has become a property of human essence.

As the play’s theory of confusion undermines the distinctions between humans and other species and refashions the idea of the human, two characteristics move into the foreground: humanity as limitless and diffused (“untireable” and “continue”). Previous scholarship has gestured at these characteristics by way of reading the play’s economy. In the late-twentieth century, Coppélia Kahn and Jody Greene both explored how excessive and wasteful consumption in the play disturbs characters’ sense of boundaries from one another and their sense of limits on their own capabilities. Kahn describes the limitless

²⁶⁹ See also Timon’s explanation of the animal-kingdom hierarchy, where he presents Apemantus with all the ways he would be thwarted if he were this or that beast: “If thou wert the lion, the fox would beguile thee; if thou wert the lamb, the fox would eat thee; if thou wert the fox, the lion would suspect thee...” (4.3.326ff). Timon also calls Apemantus the “ass” that broke the city’s walls (4.3.349).

bounty Timon misleadingly believes he possesses at the beginning of the play when he gives away jewels and money, insures a dowry, and pays to free a friend from debtors' prison.²⁷⁰ However, Kahn does not analyze Timon's condition after his Athenian coffers run dry. Strangely, instead of his well of influence drying up, after he self-exiles to escape his predatory former-friends, his servants meet and imagine themselves as conduits through which Timon can live vicariously. They describe themselves as wearing Timon's livery on their hearts and now

part[ing]
Into this sea of air. (4.2.21-2)

By metonymy, the servants distribute Timon, carrying a symbol of him with them wherever they go. Yet the image is even more poignantly visceral: his livery, a sign of who Timon was, pierces through their skin and settles on their hearts. It positively recycles the earlier images of the lords tasting and eating Timon; this time, a metonym for Timon transgresses a bodily boundary and is absorbed, mixed and mingled with the servants' organs, to facilitate and broadcast Timon's afterlife wherever the servants travel. In this way, the play seems to indicate that an individual's humanity is not restricted to their personal body. As Kuzner puts it, the play dissociates selfhood from self-possession.²⁷¹

Greene, too, argues that the play thinks through the consequences of defying boundaries. She identifies the intimate and toxic relationship between patron and client *Timon of Athens* dramatizes as "sodomitical," in the early-modern conception of that

²⁷⁰ Coppélia Kahn, "'Magic of bounty,'" 39.

²⁷¹ James Kuzner, "*Timon of Athens*: Skepticism, Sovereignty, Sodomy," in *Shakespeare: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. Madhavi Menon (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 363.

idea.²⁷² She draws from Jonathan Goldberg's definition of sodomy, a term he describes, following Foucault, as "confused" in the early modern period because it denoted a wide array of non-normative behaviors. Thus, "confusion" in Goldberg's sense means something closer to "inconsistent" in the sense that not all sodomites committed the same sin. One primarily a male, could be a sodomite for exhibiting sexual or non-sexual behaviors that threatened the stability of a number of institutions—the family, the state, the court, or the market.²⁷³ The sodomitical behaviors Greene focuses on in the play—intimate male friendship, prodigality, and unnatural reproduction—also indicate confusion in the play's sense of this word because they are figured through gruesome metaphors of mixing and mingling one's flesh and blood with another's. Above, I quoted Apemantus' grotesque condemnation of Timon's lavish banquets: "what a number of men eats Timon and he sees 'em not! It grieves me to see so many dip their meat in one man's blood" (1.2.39-41). In another moment, Timon recycles Apemantus' cannibalistic humor by wishing he could pay his creditors back with his heart and blood: "Cut my heart in sums" (3.4.90); "Tell out my blood" (3.4.92). Emphasizing the Athenians' vulturine behaviors, these metaphors figure perverse conditions of the human and of life. The idea behind Apemantus' metaphor is that Timon, perhaps even humanity itself, is distributive. Apemantus imagines that being ingested by and nourishing others is a condition of Timon's human life. Timon's metaphors reinforce the idea of distribution as a kind of life as he imagines that distributing his literal blood and viscera will support

²⁷² Jody Greene, "'You Must Eat Men': The Sodomitic Economy of Renaissance Patronage," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1 (1994): 163-197, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-1-2-163>.

²⁷³ Jonathan Goldberg, *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 3, 16-19. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 1 (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 101.

Athenians' lives and the thriving of Athens' economy.

Confused with and distributed among different bodies, Timon becomes an opportunity for thinking about the temporal and spatial conditions of life. A consequence of depicting one's life as shared, mingling with and flowing from one body to another, is that one can start to exist simultaneously in different places. This idea is accentuated in the play by the fact that while Timon makes his last appearance three scenes before the play ends, he is still very much present in the final scenes through a gravestone and a wax impression of the epitaphs on his grave. Like Timon's fair-weather friends who devour him, like the servants who wear his livery on their hearts, the gravestone and wax impression, too, are objects that carry the life of Timon throughout this world. They distribute him spatially and maintain his presence long after his organic body might decay. Moreover, the peculiar way Timon exists—or more accurately, is embodied—in the final scenes of the play through his gravestone and a wax impression of it mirrors the first scene of the play where the Poet's and Painter's descriptions of Timon preface and stand in for his physical body. Involved in spreading Timon in space and time, the *memento mori* likewise remind us of the play's interest in confusion as a mode of poetic representation.

Confusion in/as Dramatic Mimesis

Embodying Timon in and mixing him with various and diverse nonhuman entities that diffuse his presence throughout the world, the nonhuman representations of Timon depict confusion as a mode of representation particularly available to the static visual arts. However, it should not surprise that a play that opens with a long critique of thinking

that resemblance is poetry's and painting's definitive goal eventually evaluates theatre's mimetic protocols.²⁷⁴ This evaluation completes the play's holistic contemplation and demonstration of how all forms of poesy can represent satiric disorder, a kind of poetic mimesis that does not strive for resemblance or likeness in its processes of imitation.

The play's assessment of drama's mimetic procedures begins in the first act and first scene, with Timon himself extremely cognizant—even suspicious—of the elements of performance and ritual banqueting encourages. In a surprising moment of criticism, because Timon seems to recognize fawning and flattery, he replies to the Jeweller's exhortation,

Believe't, dear lord,
You mend the jewel by the wearing it,

with a curt, "Well mocked" (1.1.175-6)—"mocked," the Arden editors gloss as, "performed."²⁷⁵ Later in the night Timon is so sophisticatedly and astutely aware that

Ceremony was but devised at first
To set a gloss on faint deeds, hollow welcomes

that it might make one forget that he is currently being gulled by innumerable disloyal sycophants (1.2.15-16).

From this early wariness of performance, which will be followed by a much more complex conversation between Apemantus and Timon about the nature and value of acting, one might expect for the play to support antitheatrical arguments. Indeed, Darryl Chalk reads the language of infection, which I remarked on as evidence of the play's theory of confusion, as echoes of antitheatrical fears that acting is like a plague; it spreads

²⁷⁴ In fact, Hunt argues that the competition between the Poet and Painter is meant to accentuate the stage as a perfecting liaison of the two that implied "that theater transcended the achievements of either poetry or painting (Hunt, "Shakespeare and the *Paragone*," 52).

²⁷⁵ Shakespeare and Middleton, *Timon of Athens*, ed. Dawson and Minton, 175n.176

madness and licentiousness all throughout society.²⁷⁶ Chalk wryly, but rightly, points out that Timon's "let confusion live" speech is "an antitheatricalist's worst nightmare" because it promotes "undifferentiation" and "social dissolution in which all degrees, customs, observances and hierarchies are to be overturned." To be clear, Chalk does not see the play as antitheatrical; rather he argues that Timon's tireless call for confusion "mimics the repetitious style of antitheatrical polemic."²⁷⁷ The play parodies antitheatrical arguments and their impassioned style; it satirizes antitheatricalists, "so enraptured by their passion that they remain unconscious of their lack of moderation, catching antitheatricity from each other."²⁷⁸ Yet, while the play may not be antitheatrical, Timon's complaints about ritual and ceremony make clear that performance—insofar as it requires and is synonymous with artifice and insofar as it involves replicating behaviors—makes some characters uncomfortable.²⁷⁹ It should not surprise, then, that the play reconceives dramatic mimesis along the same lines as it reconceives the mimetic protocols of poetry and painting.

Thus, the operative question is not whether the play supports or condemns

²⁷⁶ Darryl Chalk, "'A nature but infected': plague and embodied transformation in *Timon of Athens*," *Early Modern Literary Studies* 12, no. 19 (2009): paragraphs 1-3.

²⁷⁷ Chalk, "'A nature but infected'," pgh. 23

²⁷⁸ Chalk, "'A nature but infected'," pgh. 28.

²⁷⁹ It goes without saying that theories of character and acting on the early modern stage have received overwhelming attention from critics. For a selection of texts that think about acting as artifice and replicating behaviors, see Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors* (London, 1579); E.K. Chambers, "The Actor's Quality," in *The Elizabethan Stage*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), 308-47; B.L. Joseph, *Elizabethan Acting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950); John L. Styan, *Shakespeare's Stagecraft* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967); M.C. Bradbrook, *Elizabethan Stage Conditions: A Study of Their Place in the Interpretation of Shakespeare's Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968); Robert Weimann, *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare's Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Elizabeth Fowler, *Literary Character: The Human Figure in Early English Writing* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Yachnin and Slights, ed. *Shakespeare and Character*; John H. Astington, *Actors and Acting in Shakespeare's Time: The Art of Stage Playing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Yu Jin Ko and Michael W. Shurgot, ed. *Shakespeare's Sense of Character: On the Page and From the Stage* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012).

theatricality: as suspicious of performance and ceremony as Timon is, surprisingly he celebrates a masque of women pretending to be Amazons which interrupts his first banquet. Thanking the players for their performance, he especially congratulates them for “entertain[ing] me with my own device” (1.2.149). Editors have wondered whether Timon is admitting he literally wrote this masque and orchestrated its performance (and therefore feigned surprise when Cupid entered spontaneously to ask if it could be played), or does he mean that this show has facilitated his desire to please his guests? (“Device” here meaning “desire” or “intention.”²⁸⁰) In either case, Timon’s favorable response to this presentation and his casting of himself as a device-deviser implies a general support of the theatre.

Timon’s oscillation between praising and tiring of theatricality indicates, then, that we should not focus on whether the play supports or condemns theatricality, but we should seek to understand its principles of theatricality. I argue here that the play seeks to re-theorize a crucial aspect of theatricality, acting’s mimetic procedures. In this section I examine how the play’s rejection of resemblance and likeness as processes of imitation emerge in characters’ assessments of acting as a mode of mimesis.

At moments, the play becomes a treatise on acting or handbook for actors; however, the standards it sets appear to conflict with Shakespeare’s more famous directions, like one from *Hamlet*: that acting should “o’erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so o’erdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as ’twere a mirror up to nature.”²⁸¹ *Hamlet*, the canon’s most

²⁸⁰ Shakespeare and Middleton, *Timon of Athens*, ed. Dawson and Minton, 194n.149.

²⁸¹ William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet Prince of Denmark*, ed. Sylvan Barnet (New York: Signet, 1963), 3.2.20-3.

involved director and performance theorist, yet most reluctant actor, insists that the purpose of playing is to reflect exactly what occurs in nature; not reproducing nature is, in fact, at odds with acting's purpose. Hamlet's theory indicates that the expectations of the *paragone*, to strive for resemblance, extend to all the sister arts—drama, as well as painting and poetry. The misanthropic Timon, by contrast, declares bitterly after he self-exiles, "His semblable, yea himself, Timon disdains" (4.3.22). Athens' betrayal disarms Timon of his former optimism, and *paragone*-like attitude, that exterior appearance reflects a true internal nature and that likeness can be trusted. Timon now reviles and distrusts the products and concept of resemblance. Since, as Hamlet opines, resemblance is typically a mandate of drama, Timon's indictment of resemblance reasserts questions about what kind of art-making practices the play endorses. Disdaining a "semblable," Timon sets the stage for the denouncement of acting that values or strives for the resemblance to or replication of the behaviors of another or of a character type.

Timon of Athens severs the connection between likeness and dramatic mimesis in the most metatheatrical moment of the play when Apemantus scolds Timon for adopting the behavior of a cynic and melancholic. Apemantus' protest manifests the play's objection to a model of imitation that celebrates and strives for likeness. After visitations from Alcibiades and two prostitutes, in trudges Apemantus to pester Timon, first, for a specific affront:

I was directed hither. Men report
Thou dost affect my manners and dost use them.
...
This is in thee a nature but affected,
A poor unmanly melancholy sprung
From change of fortune. Why this spade, this place,
This slave-like habit and these looks of care?
Thy flatterers yet wear silk, drink wine, lie soft,

Hug their diseased perfumes and have forgot
 That ever Timon was. Shame not these woods
 By putting on the cunning of a carper.
 Be thou a flatterer now and seek to thrive
 By that which has undone thee: hinge thy knee
 And let his very breath whom thou'lt observe
 Blow off thy cap; praise his most vicious strain
 And call it excellent. Thou wast told thus;
 Thou gav'st thine ears, like tapsters that bade welcome,
 To knaves and all approachers. 'Tis most just
 That thou turn rascal; had'st thou wealth again,
 Rascals should have't. Do not assume my likeness.

TIMON

Were I like thee, I'd throw away myself.

APEMANTUS

Thou hast cast away thyself, being like thyself
 A madman so long, now a fool. (4.3.197-220)

The thesis of Apemantus' grievance—that Timon does not deserve the misanthropic persona he has put on because he has not suffered as Apemantus has—is built on an infrastructure of phrases expressing displeasure with Timon's attempt to assume his position by resembling the behaviors of a melancholic-cynic: “affect my manners,” “nature but affected,” “slave-like habit,” “putting on the cunning of a carper.” Apemantus returns over and over to the problem of likeness, even bookending his complaint with this concern: “Do not assume my likeness.” It's a chilling command that excludes Timon from a particular social position because he is apparently unfit to inhabit it. On the one hand, Timon does not have the constitution because he has been bred as part of a community of “rascals,” who rotate between sycophant and benefactor. Apemantus, a

slave whom fortune's tender arm
 With favour never clasped,

has never participated in this circuit (4.3.249-50). On the other hand, Apemantus implies that his character cannot be performed by mimicking. The repetition of “like” and “likeness” at the end of this exchange suggests it's not just Timon acting like *Apemantus*

that bothers him; likeness, itself, is thrust into the spotlight as the central problematic operation. Apemantus' last retort attacks Timon for behaving as if likeness is a way to be and operate in this world. "Being like" actually effaces Timon. He cast away his true, unique self to fit into these disparaging categories, "madman" or "fool."

Considering the source of the complaint, Apemantus, and his function in the play as the original cynic and satirist of unsavory Athenian behavior underscore the connection the playwrights are making here between drama and the play's satirical, confusing work. Apemantus' name contains many clues to the aesthetic and ontology of mixing and mingling that the play seeks to dramatize. First, his name can be dissected as "ape-man," perhaps an endorsement of the confusion of species for which Timon pleads. Second, suggesting that the play's stalwart satirist is a combination of ape and man reinforces the peculiar satiric message the play attempts to transmit: Athens must be confused to be corrected; categories, such as human and non-human, must be mixed and mingled. Moreover, the ape-man signals the playwrights' participation in a long-standing association of apes and satire. The image of the ape or the term "poet-ape" were often used to satirize bad poets and their poetry. Sidney blames the "poet-apes" for a low estimation of English poetry.²⁸² Jonson's famous epigram, "On Poet-Ape," scolds the thief who "would pick and glean" and "takes up all, makes each man's wit his own."²⁸³ Such an impostor collects and reproduces others' work instead of creating their own. Finally, preceding *Timon of Athens* by less than a decade, John Marston's *The Scourge of Villainie* (1598), portrays a world run by apes who slavishly mimic foreign fashion and

²⁸² Sidney, *Defence*, 53.

²⁸³ Jonson, "On Poet-Ape," in *Ben Jonson: The Complete Poems*, pg. 51, ln. 5, 8.

represent “false poetic innovation.”²⁸⁴

Beyond its association with bad poetry, “aping” has a specifically theatrical history. Referring to acting as “aping,” as many anti-theatricalists did, was a double charge against one’s humanity and decorum: “in imitating other men, mimicking their facial expressions, gestures, and behavior, the human actor not only is mimicking the ape but in the performance of imitation is behaving exactly like the monkey.”²⁸⁵ Acting, then, was seen as doubly debasing—an act of mimicking something that is not human and behaving like a specific, lowly non-human. Mimicry and behaving-like are chief among Apemantus’ complaints against Timon, which means although his name associates him closely with acting as mimicry, his screed against likeness and mimicry suggests that he is the mouthpiece for a different theory of acting. His name is an opportunity for defamiliarization: Shakespeare and Middleton name him “Apemantus” in order to, literally, nominate him as a representative of theatrical practice, but his principles are, like misanthropic Timon’s, not supportive of resemblance-based mimesis.

Bitterly negative, Apemantus does not suggest an alternative to resemblance-based acting. Yet the refusal, alone, resonates with the play’s confused poetics, a poetics that routinely seeks simply disruption instead of clear re-organization. Recall Alcibiades’ ultimate intention for war and peace to constantly leech on one another such that neither

²⁸⁴ See James Knowles, “‘Can ye not tell a man from a marmoset?’: Apes and Others on the Early Modern Stage,” in *Renaissance Beasts: Of Animals, Humans, and Other Wonderful Creatures*, ed. Erica Fudge (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 142. For more on ape-human resemblance, see Edward Topsell, “Of the Ape,” in *The historie of foure-footed beastes* (London, 1607), 2-5; Susan Wiseman, “Monstrous Perfectibility: Ape-Human Transformations in Hobbes, Bulwer, Tyson,” in *At the Borders of the Human: Beasts, Bodies and Natural Philosophy in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Erica Fudge, Ruth Gilbert, and Susan Wiseman (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 215-38. See Erica Fudge, “Screaming Monkeys: The Creatures in the Bear Garden,” in *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 11-33 for an insightful reading of how watching monkey-baiting and bear-baiting, the para-theatrical spectacles that occurred just adjacent to the Globe, reveals the cruel “animal that lurks beneath the surface” of man (15).

²⁸⁵ Knowles, “‘Can ye not tell a man from a marmoset?’,” 143.

war or peace alone pervades Athens (5.5.81-2) or Timon's wish for "confounding contraries" (4.1.20) to proliferate all through Athens, instead of the clear usurpation of one opposite over another. The play's poetics is not teleologically-oriented; it does not seek to create clear, finished products, just as Dawson's description of Timon affirms: he is "somehow pre- or post-character, a figure on the outer edge of representation."²⁸⁶ Accordingly, instead of proposing a new theory of acting, Apemantus merely condemns Timon's mimicry and tells him to become a sycophant. Reading this exchange for its metatheatrical theory of acting, we have no idea what kind of product will follow or replace the disavowed theory that dramatic mimesis requires resemblance. Apemantus only encourages finding a way of being that doesn't respond or correspond to what came before. He advocates for a model of living, being, and acting that breaks with precedence; whoever Timon will be should emerge from what is foreign and unfamiliar to him, nothing like himself.

Timon of Athens' approach to confusion as a kind of order manifested in a society's ethics, politics, and sense of life differs dramatically from the dominant way confusion in the theatre has been theorized: as an epistemological and phenomenological condition that early modern theatre not only induced in its audiences but also leveraged as theatre's distinctive poetic practice. William N. West recounts how audiences in the last quarter of the sixteenth century often felt confused by productions' strange sights and sounds to the point that they had trouble deciphering what they were watching and trouble responding to it: "*confounding* and *confusion* become almost proper terms for the experience of playgoing."²⁸⁷ Towards the end of the century, it appears that playwrights

²⁸⁶ See note 191 above.

²⁸⁷ West, "But This Will Be a Mere Confusion'," 219, original emphasis.

started to recognize and harness the power of confusion; confusion became, “finally, productive.” Among the things it produced was an appreciation for theatre as a space in which to consider the power and consequences of deception and disorder.²⁸⁸

West identifies two theatrical traditions that emerged in the last years of the sixteenth century: one that saw theatre as “conveying knowledge despite disorder,” and another that saw theatre as “taking effect by means of or within disorder.”²⁸⁹ One of the tropes playwrights used to work within this latter tradition was the mad or disguised character, a character audience members would already find mentally disordered, like *The Spanish Tragedy*’s (1592) Hieronimo. In the final movement of this play, Hieronimo conspires with the audience to stage a dumb show of murder in which he will cast those who effected and were affected by the murder of his son. What the audience does not know, however, is that Hieronimo means to really kill his actors. Therefore, there is a moment when the audience watching realizes that Hieronimo has committed murder instead of pretending to commit murder. The process to this realization—feeling confused and then un-confusing oneself—not only turns feeling misled or uniformed into a hermeneutic one can use to meaningfully analyze the play’s work, but it casts confusion as a necessary device to properly understand the play.

West does acknowledge that acting requires some material and physical confusions: “some literal confusion or mixing together seems to be a necessary part of dramatic mimesis, whenever one figure imitates, takes the place of, or represents another.”²⁹⁰ While this remark might immediately bring to mind Apemantus’ complaint

²⁸⁸ West, “‘But This Will Be a Mere Confusion’,” 219.

²⁸⁹ West, “‘But This Will Be a Mere Confusion’,” 220.

²⁹⁰ West, “‘But This Will Be a Mere Confusion’,” 219.

about Timon affecting the behaviors of a melancholy cynic and outcast, West appears to align mixing together and substitution in the exact way the play refuses. West's alignment suggests that confusion in dramatic mimesis is based in resemblance: whether an actor playing a character or a character disguised as another character, the player should strive to mix their qualities with the those of the figure they imitate to the point that the player and the figure they imitate are indistinguishable. For West, imitation requires faithful mimicry, acting enough *like* a character so to reasonably pass for them. The relationship between confusion and dramatic mimesis West articulates does not quite appreciate that mixing together does not guarantee cohesion and harmony, that confusion—mixing, mingling, blending—as a method does not guarantee a product that looks like any of its constitutive parts. As an operation, confusion is ambivalent to likeness.

Though *Timon of Athens*' poetics of confusion is more material than phenomenological or epistemological, it is no less instructive. In staging a poetics rooted in confusion—mixing, mingling, diffusing, and suffusing—instead of in likeness, the play illustrates the ways poesy, especially satire, creates. Instead of the play's satire becoming “a dead end, morally and structurally,” because of the disorder it creates and endorses its satire forces readers to sit with a very particular and perhaps discomfiting model of a golden world. Mixing genres, endorsing a future where hierarchies and categories are scrambled, and encouraging creation by mixing instead of resembling any prior example, this play imagines a world where ethics, politics, or what is even meant by life is neither stable nor clear.

While this chapter has illustrated how *Timon of Athens*' non-teleological disorder

puts its readers and audience members in an uncomfortable position, where—very much on purpose—nothing is clarified, my next chapter shows Francis Bacon wielding disorder as a much more pleasing didactic tool. From one example of what a disordered world—ethics, politics, and what it means to be human—could look like, I turn to knowledge and observe how Bacon embraces disorder in order to develop various and fruitful methods for discovering and representing knowledge. While the constant changeability of Athens’ ethics, politics, and conditions for living can feel disheartening in this play, Bacon models how variety-producing disorder unlocks the secrets of nature.

Francis Bacon's Works of the Imagination: Varying Forms of Knowledge-Creation

Many may think that disorder and Francis Bacon—one of the seventeenth century's most dedicated cartographers of nature's creative processes—make strange bedfellows. However, it is my hope that my previous chapter, illustrating confusion as a process for satirizing, or creating “an ordered disorder,” has helped to solidify that what we perceive as “disorder” can be the signal of *creating* something new. (Athens, neither fully peaceful nor fully at war, may be on its way to being more legibly one or the other, but, uncomfortably, it is stuck in-process at the end of the play.) “Disorder” is what we call the necessary messiness involved in creating, when all sorts of varying things unexpectedly—because newly—come together. Like many of *Timon of Athens*' readers, who need to make the play make sense, the seventeenth-century natural philosopher, seeking to understand how nature creates, is constantly confronted with partial and variable information he feels he must marshal into order and organization.²⁹¹ Indeed, Bacon, himself, remarks that “[t]he human understanding is of its own nature prone to suppose the existence of more order and regularity in the world than it finds.”²⁹² This admission implies that, while Bacon was among the pre-eminent natural philosophers, he was also fully aware that because nature is constantly creating new and various things, it is constantly in a state of disorder. To truly understand nature, then, requires interpretive

²⁹¹ Indeed, Antonio Pérez-Ramos describes the seventeenth-century natural philosopher's project as searching to “comprehend Nature as an ordered and harmonious whole.” See Antonio Pérez-Ramos, *Francis Bacon's Idea of Science and the Maker's Knowledge Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 40.

²⁹² Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. 8, ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath (London: Houghton Mifflin, 1857-64), Bk. 1, Aphor. 45, pg. 79.

Hereafter citations from the Spedding, Ellis, Heath edition will be cited *SEH* followed by volume and page number. *The New Organon* will be abbreviated *NO*.

methods that can register and even imitate nature's disorder—its tendencies toward change and variety, especially in the creative process. Thus Bacon pledges: "I will preserve, therefore, even as the heavenly bodies themselves do...a variable constancy."²⁹³

Bacon maintains his sights on one goal, but he recognizes he will need to take varying paths toward his goal of mapping a nature that tends toward change and variety.²⁹⁴

Throughout Bacon's career, he subtly re-affirms his dedication to imitating nature's variety by invoking the figure of Proteus, "him of the many shapes...a prophet triply great; as knowing the future, the past, and the secrets of the present."²⁹⁵ "[H]im of the many shapes," Proteus embodies a central tenet of Bacon's natural philosophy—nature's variety. As an ancient figment of the imagination, he also signals an old tradition of which Bacon, too, partakes: mixing imagination and natural philosophy, resulting in fables or stories that illustrate and generate natural philosophical principles and methods. Indeed, over the course of his career Bacon turns to Proteus more than ten times as a way to represent and explain both one of his foundational theories of nature—that it tends toward change and variety, "many shapes"—and one of the methods for discovering nature's truths through shape-shifting and various forms of creating and representing knowledge.²⁹⁶

I mean "form" in the very particular Baconian sense, where it describes the steps

²⁹³ Bacon, *Theory of Heaven*, *SEH*, 10.480.

²⁹⁴ For Bacon on nature's tendency toward change and variety, see: Bacon, *NO*, ed. Jardine and Silverthorne, Bk. 1, Aphor. 66, pg. 53-55; Bk. 2, Aphor. 29, pg. 148-149; Bacon, *AL*, 123, 178, 197.

²⁹⁵ Bacon, *Description of the Intellectual Globe*, *SEH*, 10.416.

²⁹⁶ The references to Proteus: *Thoughts on the Nature of Things*, *SEH*, 10.295; *Cogitationes de Scientia Humana*, *SEH*, 5.439; *AL*, 178; *Wisdom of the Ancients*, *SEH*, 13.116-8 (hereafter *WA*); *Description of the Intellectual Globe*, *SEH*, 10.407, 415-6; *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, *SEH*, 8.415, 9.82, 9.168 (hereafter *DAS*); *Sylva Sylvarum*, *SEH*, 4.222 (hereafter *SS*); *Outline of a Natural and Experimental History* (*Parasceve*), in *The New Organon*, ed. Jardine and Silverthorne, 227.

or movements by which something comes to be.²⁹⁷ Form is something's "law of act or motion" or "the source of its coming-to-be."²⁹⁸ Form is the "passage" Bacon references when he writes in the preface to his collection of thirty-one ancient, mythic fables,²⁹⁹ *Wisdom of the Ancients* (1609), that the fables contained within "lea[d] the vnderstanding of man by an easie and gentle passage through all nouell and abstruse inuentions."³⁰⁰ Though perhaps easy and gentle, fables do not take one form only. Like the matter Proteus represents, they take infinite forms. In *Wisdom of the Ancients*, for example, in some entries—like, in fact, an entry on Proteus that is also his most careful and extended treatment of Proteus—Bacon recounts a story of the mythological figure and afterwards analyzes each detail for its moral, political, or natural philosophical significance. The Proteus myth begins by describing Proteus as a prophet-herdsman who can recount the past, present, and future, lives under an immense cave and counts his flock every day.

²⁹⁷ Until recently, early modern literary studies has largely approached "form" as a state, something rigid, or at least something seized for a period of time—conceptions that follow from Aristotelian and Platonic natural philosophy. For the history of conceptions of "form" (and how they've changed in current scholarship), see Levinson, "What is New Formalism?"; Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*; Turner, "Lessons from Literature for the Historian of Science (and Vice Versa)"; Mann and Sarkar, "Introduction: Capturing Proteus," esp. 4-6 and 18n.11.

²⁹⁸ *NO*, ed. Jardine and Silverthorne, Bk. 1, Aphor. 51, pg. 45; Bk. 2, Aphor. 1, pg. 102; Karl R. Wallace's description is also helpful: form is "a kind of behavior, or a kind of event or motion. See Wallace, "Francis Bacon and Method," 249.

²⁹⁹ In the preface to *WA*, Bacon categorizes the stories as "fables," which he defines in *AL* as narratives that hold secrets of "religion, policy, or philosophy" (*WA*, *SEH*, 13.75; *AL*, 187). I add the adjective "mythic" because the subjects of the fables exhibit supernatural behaviors, like Proteus's shape-shifting. Scholars of the fable—both early modern fables and fables in general—do not consider the presence of gods or god-like characters necessary components of the fable. Myths about the gods are merely one kind of fable. See H.J. Blackham, *The Fable as Literature* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), xvii.

Bacon also uses a third term for these works of the imagination that nevertheless contribute to "human learning": "parable," which he defines in *AL* as "a narration applied only to express some special purpose or conceit" (*AL*, 175, 187). Though in the preface to *WA* he clarifies that parable is a subset of fable—fables often have parabolic moments—he also uses these two terms interchangeably (Bacon, *WA*, *SEH*, 13.76). For example, in the preface to *WA* he calls them "fables," but in the text's dedication to The Early of Salisbury he calls the stories "parables" (*WA*, *SEH*, 13.75, 68). For consistency and ease, I use "fable" throughout.

³⁰⁰ Francis Bacon, *The Wisedome of the Ancients, Written in Latine By the Right Honourable Sir Francis Bacon Knight, Baron of Verulam and Lord Chancelour of England*, trans. Arthur Gorges Knight (London, 1619), sig. a9r.

Intruders who desire his help must “secure his hands with handcuffs, and then...bind him with chains. Whereupon he on his part, in order to get free, would turn himself into all manner of strange shapes—fire, water, wild beasts, &c., till at last he returned again to his original shape.”³⁰¹ Immediately following the story, Bacon deciphers its details to reveal Proteus as shape-shifting nature or matter and the handcuffs and chains as the artificial manipulations or conditions of experiment any “skilful [*sic*] Servant of Nature” (his term for a natural philosopher) places on matter in order to force it to reveal all of its characteristics and embodiments.³⁰² In other entries, Bacon intersperses story and interpretation, not only interrupting the flow of the story but also inserting his untimely presence as a non-ancient interpreter into an ancient story. Similarly, in other texts where Bacon utilizes imagination to explicate or generate his theories, he creates forms that imitate Proteus’ ability to recount the past, present, and future, not necessarily in that order.

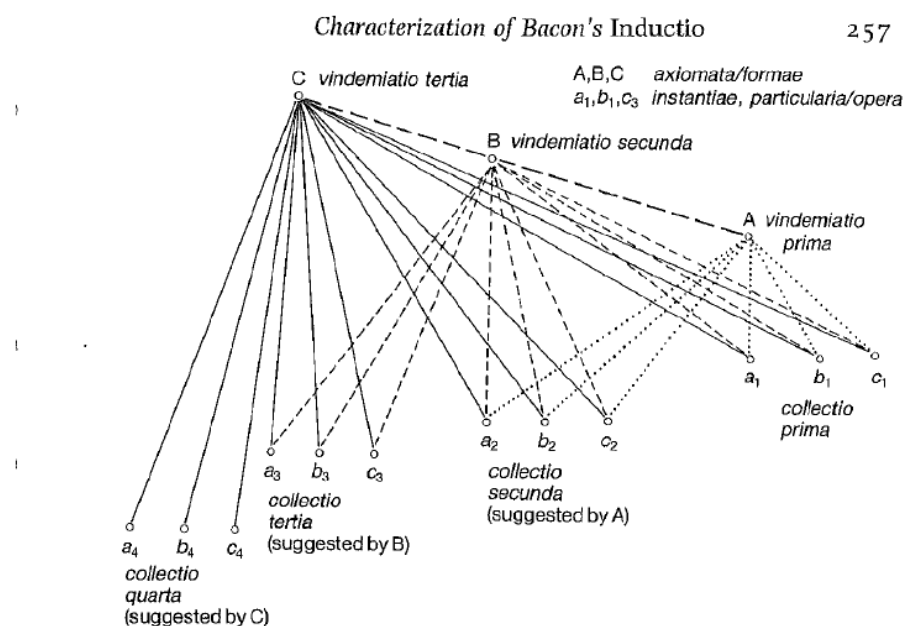
On the one hand, given the philosophical principle Bacon means to represent and affirm with the Proteus myth—matter as flexible and tending towards variety—it makes sense that Bacon’s most sustained engagement with Proteus would occur in a written form that has no set path. On the other hand, because the myth explicates one of his central principles of nature, one would expect to find this principle represented in a form and mode he typically uses for natural philosophy. That form is induction, and aphorism has often been considered one of its modes.

Induction is the regimented and repetitive process of—first—observing nature or conducting experiments—then—interpreting the findings, and—finally—proposing

³⁰¹ WA, SEH, 13.117.

³⁰² WA, SEH, 13.118.

conclusions that build “in progressive stages” up to universal axioms.³⁰³ Bacon’s insistence that induction is an absolutely progressive and sequential activity can lead one to visualize induction as stair-steps. The horizontal plateau represents observation, collecting data, and experimentation. When one has collected sufficient data she climbs the stair to an axiom, from which point she begins data collection all over again, enabling her to create and climb the next stair. Antonio Pérez-Ramos diagrams this process in another way:



From *collectio prima* (a_1, b_1, c_1), or first particular observations, infer a *vindemiatio prima* (A), or first axiom, that is then tested by second collections (a_2, b_2, c_2) and revised to a *vindemiatio secunda* (B), and so on until the final universal axiom is reached.³⁰⁴ If somewhat chaotic, Pérez-Ramos' diagram still visualizes a form of knowledge-making

³⁰³ NO, SEH, 8.60.

³⁰⁴ Pérez-Ramos, *Francis Bacon's Idea of Science*, 257.

that is both progressive and sequential.

Insisting that “knowledge...ought to be delivered and intimated, if it were possible, in the same method where it was invented,” Bacon often writes in aphorisms to convey this knowledge.³⁰⁵ Aphorisms present “a knowledge broken” into pieces, pieces capable of being rearranged so that related particular observations appear together.³⁰⁶ Stylistically, “discourse of illustration is cut off; recitals of examples are cut off...there remaineth nothing to fill the Aphorisms but some good quantity of observation.”³⁰⁷ Aphorisms do away with the narrative—the sense of time and history—of fables or stories; they transmit pure observation for the purpose of assisting natural philosophical progress. Thus a reference to Proteus in *Parasceve* (1620), a part of one of Bacon’s quintessential natural philosophies and written in numbered aphorisms, reduces the story from *Wisdom of the Ancients* to “[a]nd the manipulations of art are like the bonds and shackles of Proteus, which reveal the ultimate strivings and struggles of matter. For bodies refuse to be destroyed or annihilated, but shift into various other shapes.”³⁰⁸

Yet precisely because Bacon also fully engages flexible and various fable or story-telling modes to investigate and represent knowledge about nature, there is good reason to suspect his comfort with a flexible form or method for investigation and discovery. This chapter traces how, over the course of Bacon’s career, story-telling evolves from a mode of representation to a form of discovery. Regardless of the iteration, story-telling affords flexibility in the representation and creation of knowledge, a flexibility that induction does not allow. Thus, I argue that Bacon’s imaginative texts

³⁰⁵ *AL*, 233-4.

³⁰⁶ *AL*, 235

³⁰⁷ *AL*, 234.

³⁰⁸ Bacon, *Outline of a Natural and Experimental History*, 227.

invent new, viable forms for knowledge-creation that do not adhere to induction's expectations for form. Bacon's scientific utopia, *New Atlantis* (1627), illustrates the fullest expression of this innovation. A fabricated story about shipwrecked sailors who encounter a hidden, scientifically-advanced society with millennia's worth of advancements, some of which were developed not long after Bacon died, this text exemplifies how features of story-telling, like creation of narrative time and history, create knowledge via forms that are neither progressive nor sequential.

I begin by dilating on the features and modes of writing Bacon and the scholars who study his works have associated with his poesy, and how his imaginative works have been valued in his philosophical endeavor. With few exceptions, this scholarship has neglected the formal and structural aspects of Bacon's imaginative works, like how exactly he enfolds natural philosophical knowledge with story and how he pries natural philosophical knowledge out of imagined conditions. Thus, I then explicate the form of *Wisdom of the Ancients* and the forms of several fables it contains in order to illuminate how employing features of story-telling helps Bacon produce various forms of representing natural knowledge. Finally, I turn to *New Atlantis* and explore how its single, extended story with events situated in specific and invented time and history creates knowledge via a form that is unlike—because not steadily progressive or sequential—the one proposed and illustrated in Bacon's natural philosophical texts. I argue that in *New Atlantis* Bacon develops a new form of inquiry and discovery by utilizing features of imaginative story-telling, instead of strictly following induction. In no way ancillary to Bacon's philosophical work, these two texts demonstrate how imagination and story-telling create abundant and various forms that lead to knowledge-

creation and discovery. They also prove that this variety is necessary for scientific inquiry, yet it is not realizable by induction. Thus, not only do these texts sit alongside his pure natural philosophies and induction in terms of enabling learning and discovery, but they surpass them in manifesting variety, one of the principles of his Great Renewal.

Cultivating and Coordinating Variety in Bacon's Written Modes and Forms

Comparing Bacon's fables and stories to induction and the modes by which he represents knowledge in his natural philosophies is a new direction in a constant topic in Bacon studies—what function imagination serves in his knowledge project. Following Bacon's own indications, scholars have long celebrated his poesy for aiding or developing scientific thought.³⁰⁹ Indeed, in the preface to *Wisdom of the Ancients*, he celebrates the fables' contribution to learning by describing them as “a kind of arc, in which the most precious portions of the sciences were deposited” and “of prime use to the sciences, and sometimes indispensable.”³¹⁰ Partly motivated by the insinuations here that poesy is a vehicle for knowledge, scholars have taken care to note poesy's “epistemological potential that neither history nor philosophy could provide.”³¹¹ The locus of that “epistemological potential” is imaginative feigning or fiction, which Bacon typically derides but also admits generates “more absolute variety, than can be found in

³⁰⁹ Francis Bacon, *The New Atlantis*, in *Francis Bacon: The Major Works*, 787 (hereafter *NA*). Cowan, “Imagination's Arts,” 143.

³¹⁰ *WA*, *SEH*, 13.69, 79-80. While the editors translate Bacon's original Latin *scientia* (and its variants) as “science,” *scientia* is actually much closer to our modern “knowledge in general,” not just the knowledge gleaned from physical experimentation.

³¹¹ Henry S. Turner, *The Corporate Commonwealth: Pluralism and Political Fictions in England, 1516-1651* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 201. See also Cowan, “Imagination's Arts,” 134-5. See also *AL*, 175, 186-9 for Bacon's explication of imagination and poesy.

the nature of things.”³¹²

My focus on poesy’s forms leads us to study fiction’s “epistemological potential” not just as *what* it generates but as *how* it generates variety. I emphasize that Bacon’s poesies do not just invent new and various things, things not seen in nature, but Bacon uses poesy to spur epistemic and epistemological variety: his imaginative texts construct various paths to representing his natural philosophical ideas. With this focus I intend to show that Bacon strives not just to verbalize a philosophy of nature’s abundant variety, but in his imaginative texts he exercises variety, suggesting that he sees variety itself as a tool for instruction and discovery.

Bacon’s mandate that poesy generate variety has received less attention, from both Bacon and scholars, than poesy’s “character of style”—how its “arts of speech,” rhetorical or poetic devices and language, aid scientific discovery.³¹³ In *Valerius terminus: Of the Interpretation of Nature* (1603), a partial draft of the *Advancement of Learning* (1605)—one of his most thorough treatises on knowledge and how to attain it—he writes that “there is no proceeding in invention of knowledge but by similitude.”³¹⁴ Indeed, in the majority of references to Proteus, he similizes. For example, explaining in the *Advancement of Learning* that matter changes shape only because of the artificial restraints put upon it, Bacon writes, “For like as a man’s disposition is never well known till he be crossed, nor Proteus ever changed shapes till he was straitened and held fast; so the passages and variations of nature cannot appear so fully in the liberty of nature, as in

³¹² AL, 186. In *De Augmentis Scientiarum* (1623), the enlargement of the *Advancement of Learning*, Bacon adds that “Poesy refreshes [the mind], by reciting things unexpected and various and full of vicissitudes” (SEH, 8.441).

See, for example, *NO*, ed. Jardine and Silverthorne, Bk. 1, Aphor. 122, pg. 94 for Bacon’s infamous rejection of “fiction and imposture.”

³¹³ AL, 186.

³¹⁴ Bacon, *Valerius Terminus: Of the Interpretation of Nature*, SEH, 6.29.

the trials and vexations of art.”³¹⁵ *Description of the Intellectual Globe* (1612) expresses the same sentiment, but is much blunter: “all I mean is, that nature, like Proteus, is forced by art to do that which without art would not be done.”³¹⁶ Bacon relies on similitudes for expressing knowledge about nature because he believes that “elements of nature, like those of language, are tied to one another” through, among other things, analogy.³¹⁷ He implies that not just expression but discovery, too, relies on similitude when he cites a “rule” that “whatsoever science is not consonant to presuppositions, must pray in the aid of similitudes.”³¹⁸ In other words, analogizing previous observations or experience to new situations forms the basis of new directions in scientific inquiry.³¹⁹ Analogies and analogical thinking are not decorative but rather constitutive of Bacon’s method.

As the examples with Proteus illustrate, though, analogy relies on variety. The difference between the two terms he likens—a mythic god, on the one hand, the substance of all things on the other—perfectly telegraphs this dependence. Though Bacon doesn’t explicitly acknowledge it, when he turns to similitude, when he turns to analogical thinking, he is coordinating variety. My point is that we should look beyond the device—similitude, simile—to acknowledge and study how linguistic devices work, what they operationalize. The devices he uses to transmit and unearth nature’s truths operationalize variety, poesy’s fundamental principle.

This realization primes us to see that even the kind of writing he deems acceptable

³¹⁵ *AL*, 178.

³¹⁶ Bacon, *Description of the Intellectual Globe*, *SEH*, 10.407.

³¹⁷ Stephen H. Daniel, “Myth and the Grammar of Discovery in Francis Bacon,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 15, no.4 (1982): 224, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40237337>.

³¹⁸ *AL*, 236.

³¹⁹ See also Katharine Park’s clarification that Bacon considered analogies most helpful and appropriate at the beginning stages of discovery and inquiry—to show “how to proceed and narrow the field of inquiry”—and when disseminating knowledge to the lay public (Katharine Park, “Bacon’s ‘Enchanted Glass,’” *Isis* 75, no.2 [June 1984]: 298-9, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/231827>).

for conveying his experiments and their results requires the cultivation and coordination of variety. Stating unequivocally that “we should not approve any discovery unless it is in writing,” Bacon names the style for writing about discovery, “written experience” or *experientia literata*.³²⁰ *Experientia literata* involves not only “unearthing unknown operations but also...transferring, compounding and applying operations already known” in order to advance discovery. In other words, it “argues by analogy.”³²¹ More specifically, “it organize[s] the otherwise scattershot materials of natural history such that a natural philosopher could extend or translate...older discoveries into new fields or apply them onto new natural phenomena.”³²² This elaboration from Jacqueline L. Cowan and Bacon’s description of *experientia literata* as transferring and translating known facts in order to advance discovery underscore that even without recognizable rhetorical devices, learning and discovery occur by harnessing variety. That is, the writing Bacon uses to teach and reveal is effective because it marshals and organizes variety.

While both his imaginative and natural philosophical works generate and harness variety, Bacon ascribes a different, more materially creative, set of actions than transference and translation to imagination’s work. According to the *Advancement of Learning*, imagination severs and joins: “the Imagination; which being not tied to the laws of matter, may at pleasure join that which nature hath severed, and sever that which nature hath joined, and so make unlawful matches and divorces of things.”³²³ Despite the flashes of disapproval in “unlawful” and “divorces,” severing and joining nevertheless

³²⁰ *NO*, ed. Jardine and Silverthorne, Bk. 1, Aphor. 101, pg. 82.

³²¹ Lisa Jardine, *Francis Bacon: Discovery and the Art of Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 144.

³²² Cowan, “Imagination’s Arts,” 148.

³²³ *AL*, 186.

suggest the power of defiantly creating something totally new, rather than substitution, as translation and transference connote. Bacon appears to further appreciate poesy's procedures when he writes, just a few lines later, that he expects more greatness, goodness, and variety from this severing and joining.

One of the certain examples of more greatness, goodness, and variety in his poesy is the society *New Atlantis* invents, Bensalem. Scholars have argued that Bensalem is Bacon's imagination of his own world's future if philosophers followed his directions for experimentation and discovery. Then "his world too will enjoy an epistemology broad enough to discover nature's most remote corners and identify the causes of all its marvels."³²⁴ Cowan's implication that the text generates a "broad" epistemology, illuminating all marvels and the remote corners of nature, suggests that the epistemology *New Atlantis* showcases is certainly greater, in the sense of more encompassing, than what existed for Bacon, and it is equipped to explain all kinds of nature's expressions. Indeed, inventing the gramophone, telephone, microphone, lasers, production of synthetic fibers and even organ transplant, *New Atlantis* presents Bacon working as a "cartographer of futurity" in a variety of industries.³²⁵

While scholars originally bestowed Bacon with this title, "cartographer of futurity," because of his inductive mapping, his imaginative texts project a possible future through forms that differ from induction's. Instead of sequential and progressive

³²⁴ Jacqueline L. Cowan, "Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* and the Alterity of the New World," *Literature and Theology* 25, no. 4 (2011): 414, [10.1093/litthe/frr048](https://doi.org/10.1093/litthe/frr048). See also Paul Salzman, "Narrative Contexts for Bacon's *New Atlantis*," in *Francis Bacon's New Atlantis: New interdisciplinary essays*, ed. Bronwen Price (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 44; Christopher Kendrick, "The Imperial Laboratory: Discovering Forms in *The New Atlantis*," *ELH* 70, no. 4 (2003): 1021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30029911>, which puts it in slightly more political terms: *New Atlantis* buttresses Bacon's "propagandistic message" for a certain kind of social cognition.

³²⁵ Francis Bacon, *The Instauration Magna Part II: Novum Organum and Associated Texts*, ed. Graham Rees with Maria Wakely (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), xlv.

induction, where investigation follows from the hypotheses of previous investigations, Bacon theorizes that poesy severs and joins; it halts, interrupts, and changes direction. That is, *Wisdom of the Ancients* and *New Atlantis* do not illustrate the severing and joining of nature, like into chimerical creatures or aberrations of nature. Rather, severing and joining occur at a formal level. In his imaginative texts Bacon severs and joins narrative and interpretive paths, creating and representing knowledge in ways that do not follow an ordered sequence but still, nevertheless, lead to nature's truth and projections of the future. My engagement with *Wisdom of the Ancients* and *New Atlantis* will show where and how severing and joining of imagined pasts, presents, and futures lead to new, various, and effective modes of representing and creating knowledge about nature.

I'm endeavoring to strengthen the limited insinuations scholars have made about how the forms of Bacon's imaginative texts support his natural philosophy. Michael Clody and Amy Boesky have made moves in this direction by considering the narrative techniques and discursive structures Bacon employs in his imaginative works. Clody examines secrets: in *New Atlantis*, a "narrative technique for concealing the mechanisms of an as-yet unrealizable society," secrets also signify nature's duplicity and ambiguity—its "heterogeneous voice" that requires deciphering.³²⁶ Clody describes how, in *Wisdom of the Ancients*, Bacon narrativizes nature's secrets in fables in order to elucidate, or at the very least disseminate, them. He chooses the fable mode because it shares the mysteriousness of secrets; for example, both secrets and fables lack a clear human origin.³²⁷ Fable also shares features with the hieroglyph, a device Bacon upholds for

³²⁶ Michael C. Clody, "Deciphering the Language of Nature: Cryptography, Secrecy, and Alterity in Francis Bacon," *Configurations* 19, no. 1 (2011): 118, 141, [10.1353/con.2011.0000](https://doi.org/10.1353/con.2011.0000).

³²⁷ See *AL*, 187.

exhibiting and requiring what is necessary for the responsible transmission of nature's truths—that is, analogy and variety. I'll say more about the hieroglyph shortly, but for the moment, I'll simply highlight its two most important qualities: the hieroglyph requires analogical thinking to work it out: traditionally, figuring out how a visual image is similar to the idea or message it signifies. At the same time, not every reader's path to deciphering the hieroglyph will be the same. Prompted by Bacon's theory that fable, in its "very frame and texture," endeavors to activate the same analogical association as the hieroglyph, Clody declares that fable "formalize[s]" "the grammar of hieroglyphic representation."³²⁸ Though not explicating the precise form of the fable, Clody nevertheless recognizes that fable's interpretive or representative scheme reveals the content of nature's secrets in ways that mirror nature's own qualities—variety and analogy. In other words, fable as a mode can leverage many different paths to truth, but its language aims still to create a clear simile between word and thing signified.

For her part, Boesky fulfills the desire for a sense of Bacon's poetic forms, noting that texts like *New Atlantis*, take the form of experiment. She calls experiment a discursive mode, "a method for 'directing and ordering' narrative as well as experience."³²⁹ She also goes a step farther than Clody and clarifies the form of this mode. The form of the "prose experiment"—among which she counts *New Atlantis*—stages and invites "revision and repetition...searching again."³³⁰ If not detailing the precise forms of *New Atlantis* or *Wisdom of the Ancients*, Boesky and others helpfully

³²⁸ WA, *SEH*, 13.76; Clody, "Deciphering the Language of Nature," 140.

³²⁹ Amy Boesky, "Bacon's *New Atlantis* and the laboratory of prose," in *The project of prose in early modern Europe and the New World*, ed. Elizabeth Fowler and Robert Greene (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 143.

³³⁰ Boesky, "Bacon's *New Atlantis* and the laboratory of prose," 144.

insist that Bacon favors modes and forms that resist the closure of meaning—forms that manifest his belief that the philosophical project he undertakes is eternal and dynamic.³³¹

Before I proceed to diagnosing *Wisdom of the Ancients*' and *New Atlantis*' precise forms, I want to dilate on two modes scholars have recognized as foundational for his imaginative works and the transmission of knowledge in general: the language-based hieroglyph and the aphorism. Both of these modes enable Bacon to create and represent knowledge via forms that not only vary but also involve severing and joining—disjointedness and interruption—like *Wisdom of the Ancients*' and *New Atlantis*' narrative forms do. Like many of his contemporaries engaged in the universal language movement and dedicated to finding ways of representing nature with as little distortion from language as possible, Bacon gravitated toward the hieroglyph—not in its truest incarnation, an image, but in principle.³³² That is, especially in his fables, he strove to perfectly invert the hieroglyph: to create visual, mental images with words that were sensuous, that inherently suggested or were analogical with, the image he wanted to convey. Choosing his words based on their analogy with images honors one of his core

³³¹ Bacon magisterially describes his Great Renewal as the beginning of “an endless progress or proficiencie” of understanding God’s natural works (*AL*, 126). He freely admits that “the thing can [not] be completely finished in the course of one lifetime, but provides for successors” (*NO*, ed. Jardine and Silverthorne, 13). See also Daniel, “Myth and the Grammar of Discovery,” 219.

Much of the scholarship on aphorism highlights Bacon’s expectation that his project will be dynamic and incomplete. See Christiane Schildknecht, “Experiments with Metaphors: On the Connection between Scientific Method and Literary Form in Francis Bacon,” in *From a Metaphorical Point of View: A Multidisciplinary Approach to the Cognitive Content of Metaphor*, ed. Zdravko Radman (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), 27-50; Oscar Kenshur, “Knowledge Broken: Bacon’s *Novum Organum* and Diderot’s *De l’Interprétation de la nature*,” in *Open Form and the Shape of Ideas: Literary Structures as Representations of Philosophical Concepts in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Lewisburg: The Bucknell University Press, 1986), 38-54; James Stephens, *Francis Bacon and the Style of Science* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), esp. 93-121.

³³² On the seventeenth-century universal language movement, see especially Robert E. Stillman, *The New Philosophy and Universal Languages in Seventeenth-Century England: Bacon, Hobbes, and Wilkins* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1995) and M.M. Slaughter, *Universal Languages and Scientific Taxonomy in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

beliefs about nature: that elements of nature are tied to one another through analogy. To his mind, hieroglyphs excelled at analogy: “hav[ing] always some similitude to the things signified” and bearing “the currency (so to speak) of things intellectual.”³³³

Analogy on its own does not imply a specific interpretive form or path—a fact Bacon appears to be aware of and remedy when he declares that “[t]he fabric of the universe, its structure, to the mind observing it, is like a labyrinth...and the twists and turns of nature are so oblique and intricate.”³³⁴ Analogy is the method, while labyrinthine is the form human interpretation must take. With the gap between word and image a human interpreter must fill, hieroglyphs reflect this condition: hieroglyphs don’t offer a road map for reading them; one reads them by groping and searching along a twisted, not-yet-chartered, and not singular path that leads toward meaning. Making the hieroglyph and the labyrinth symbols or vehicles for his interpretive scheme, Bacon satisfies his desire for a form that inspires and accommodates difference and variety.³³⁵ The labyrinth does not just lead in one straight direction, and each interpreter will have her own path toward deciphering the hieroglyph. In fact, Bacon expects that ideas will be transmitted and represented in ways that engage readers of all kinds and abilities. He establishes this “rule”: “whatever can be laid down into differences sufficiently numerous to explain the variety of notions...may be made to convey the thoughts of one man to another.”³³⁶ We shouldn’t forget, though, that despite seeming final and dominant, this rule must be negotiated with, restrained by, careful and thoughtful analogy. Bacon’s program requires both carefully selecting the right word that suggests the image the

³³³ *DAS, SEH*, 9.110.

³³⁴ *NO*, ed. Jardine and Silverthorne, 10.

³³⁵ See Clody, “Deciphering the Language of Nature,” 141.

³³⁶ *DAS, SEH*, 9.108-9.

interpreter of nature intends and also allowing the interpretive process to be flexible and idiosyncratic, while leading toward truth.

Aphorism, the other written mode he favors, channels difference and variety not as features of interpretation, but as features of presentation. As I mentioned in the chapter's introduction, Bacon describes aphorisms as "representing a knowledge broken"; they are disjointed interpretations, rules, and findings.³³⁷ James Stephens avers that Bacon considers the aphorism "an ideal method of delivery" because

it mirrors knowledge as it actually exists. It is employed to lead the reader from the confines of his own mental world into a new experience of invention...The aphorism compels the more curious and competent readers to unravel the mystery and fill in the gaps. Since knowledge exists only in portions and fragments, an abrupt and bare style of delivery is most appropriate to it.³³⁸

Stephens' assessment that the aphorism compels the reader to "unravel the mystery and fill in the gaps" aligns with the function and character of hieroglyph. In addition to this connection, he re-asserts some of the formal qualities Bacon, himself, ascribes to aphorism. Stephens' reference to an abrupt style that properly conveys our fragmented knowledge of nature rephrases Bacon's characterization of aphorisms as "scattered sentences, not linked together by an artificial method."³³⁹ In an early and non-natural philosophical text, Bacon explains for himself the intellectual value of this mode: "distinct and disjoint aphorisms...leave the wit of man more free to turn and toss [and thus to serve] more several purposes and applications."³⁴⁰ Characterized by fragmentation and disjointedness, aphorism preserves the opportunity for formal difference and variety. Even more, Bacon celebrates this mode as uniquely and supremely supportive of

³³⁷ *AL*, 235.

³³⁸ James Stephens, *Francis Bacon the Style of Science*, 121.

³³⁹ *NO, SEH*, vol. 8, Bk.1, Aphor. 86, pg. 121.

³⁴⁰ Bacon, *Maxims of the Law, SEH*, 14.182.

intellectual growth—enabling the interpreter to be “more free” in their advancements and discoveries.

While *Novum Organum* (1620) is the most obviously aphoristic of Bacon’s texts—in the sense that it contains numbered paragraphs of self-contained musings on all topics relating to nature—it is not as intellectually and physically scattered and disjointed as *Wisdom of the Ancients*, a collection of thirty-one ancient myths that do not seem to follow any underlying order or criteria for selection.³⁴¹ Scholars have recognized that *New Atlantis*, too, deploys the aphorism: the part of the text that captivates readers as being the most “scientific” is a weakly-organized list, linked by “also’s,” of all the experiments and principles the fellows of a somewhat secretive educational organization, Salomon’s House, develop. The disjunction, interruption, and scattering goes beyond the noticeably natural philosophical parts of the text, however. Bacon relies on these maneuvers to tell the story of the island, its inhabitants, and the encounter with the shipwrecked sailors.

The remainder of this chapter focuses, in part, on how Bacon employs the forms and features associated with the hieroglyph and aphorism—scattered, disjointed, labyrinthine—as features of the narrative forms his imaginative texts follow. Aphorism and the entries in *Wisdom of the Ancients* are clearly connected in ways that legitimate fable as a mode for representing knowledge about nature. *Wisdom of the Ancients’* fables are numbered entries, typically no more than two to four pages each, and addressing desire next to profit next to the state of man. The visual similarities cue readers to recognize the fables as like aphorisms—and therefore insinuate them as instruments for

³⁴¹ See Kenshur, *Open Form*, 44, where he quotes from the beginnings of aphorisms 74-83 from Book 1 of *Novum Organum* to show how they build upon and transition from one another.

his natural philosophical endeavor. Also, by the end of his career, Bacon adapts three fables from *Wisdom of the Ancients* into the enlargement of his *Advancement of Learning*, *De Augmentis Scientiarum* (1623), as “examples” of philosophy theorized in ancient fables.³⁴² Standing alone in *Wisdom of the Ancients* and rewritten and integrated into *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, the fables appear to stretch and re-form aphorism, actions he insists are essential for his Great Renewal to continue and succeed. That is, Bacon doesn’t just transfer but he adapts the fable, and the knowledge it conveys, to different circumstances. Thus, while the fables look very much like aphorisms—the device he relies on for communicating knowledge in his straightforwardly natural philosophical texts—fiction and story-telling allow liberties with sequence, order, and form that induction does not. Therefore, the aphoristic-looking fables engage disjunction, scattering, and a labyrinthine structure even more fully than the scientific aphorism. Adding imaginative story to aphorism resulting in fables that portray knowledge about nature, he transposes a requirement of the mind to his work—that it “be capable and susceptible of growth and reformation.”³⁴³

From here, I argue that scattered, disjointed, and labyrinthine extend to the quintessence of Bacon’s story-telling, especially in how he creates time and history in *Wisdom of the Ancients* and *New Atlantis*. I build on work by Erin Kathleen Kelly, who is among the few scholars to note how important narrative is for “information-processing”—that “Baconian induction often resembles a narrative process,” unfolding in time and making more sense as time proceeds.³⁴⁴ However, I intend to sharpen the

³⁴² DAS, SEH, 8.44.

³⁴³ AL, 165.

³⁴⁴ Erin Kathleen Kelly, “‘Experience has not yet learned her letters’: Narrative and Information in the Works of Francis Bacon,” *Configurations* 24, no. 2 (2016): 160, 149, [10.1353/con.2016.0013](https://doi.org/10.1353/con.2016.0013).

distinction between the form of induction and the forms of Bacon's imaginative texts by dialing in on the forms of his imaginative narratives—tracing the twists, turns, disjunctions, and scattering in their plots. I show how creating diegetic time, shaping a collection of historical or scientific details into a story, upends the very regulated interpretative scheme Bacon theorizes in his natural philosophical works, creating it wholly anew.

Sharpening the distinction between induction and the narrative forms in Bacon's imaginative texts, I also aim to reinforce that Bacon's imaginative work generates knowledge about nature in its own right and in its own ways; his imaginative work is not just a handmaiden to his philosophical practices. Thus, I aim to change how scholars have historically framed the discussion of Bacon's imaginative texts. Discussions of the relationship or interaction between Bacon's imaginative and philosophical work often privilege the philosophy or justify Bacon's imaginative work because it supports or clarifies something about his philosophy or philosophical method. Kelly's assertion that narrative has a "heuristic value within Bacon's empiricism and method of induction," and Stephens' more specific argument about particular modes—that from the details of pagan myths Bacon sources the doctrines and theories of his philosophy—showcase this tendency.³⁴⁵ It can seem as if Bacon's philosophy or philosophical practices provide necessary relief for seeing the value of his imaginative works' features and strategies. While my argument that Bacon's imaginative texts exhibit and reinforce variety as a central tenet of nature fully endorses the idea that his imaginative work supports his

³⁴⁵ Kelly, "Experience has not yet learned her letters," 149; James Stephens, "Bacon's Fable-Making: A Strategy of Style," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 14, no. 1 (1974): 111, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/449686>.

philosophy, I propose that we focus on and map the narrative forms in his imaginative works precisely because they differ from those Bacon endorses for induction and physical experimentation. More than differing, Bacon's imaginative forms engage a kind of variety induction does not. By attending to the forms of Bacon's imaginative texts we, in a sense, add to but also answer a *desiderata*, a topic for future research that will further develop human knowledge. As Kelly observes, Bacon's *desiderata* themselves are products of the imagination; they project what can and may be possible—but also useful—to know.³⁴⁶ Delineating the forms of Bacon's imaginative works, we provide the practical proof, that is proof from practice, to the theories he puts forth about poesy—that it is “extremely licensed,” that it severs and joins, that it produces a “more absolute variety than can be found in the nature of things.”

Proteus: A Prophet “thrice excellent”

In the same section from the *Advancement of Learning* where Bacon theorizes poesy writ large, he dials down to the characteristics of particular modes, including fable. Like the literary theorists who precede him, Sidney and Puttenham, Bacon derides the abuses of the mode but elaborates its benefits when used appropriately.³⁴⁷ Almost exclusively, he focuses on what fable helps an author accomplish (somewhat regrettable for those who search for attention to fables' forms). Authors employ fables when they need or desire to transmit some secrets of “religion, policy, or philosophy” in ways that

³⁴⁶ Kelly, “Experience has not yet learned her letters,” 159n.45.

³⁴⁷ See *AL*, 176, 215. See also *DAS*, *SEH*, 8.442-444.

are “sharp or subtle” and will surpass the understanding of vulgar or untrained readers.³⁴⁸ In just four years, however, Bacon makes a noticeable reversal, endorsing and relying on fable in *Wisdom of the Ancients* as a “method of teaching, whereby inventions that are new and abstruse and remote from vulgar opinions may find an easier passage to the understanding.”³⁴⁹ Fables are a narrative or invented story which contain a hidden truth.³⁵⁰ Thus, for fables, Bacon also admits a practice that he elsewhere condemns: fiction.³⁵¹ Typically for Bacon, fiction is indistinguishable from a lie, but fiction in fables apparently amplifies an underlying philosophical truth or meaning: “But when a story is told which could never have entered any man’s head either to conceive or relate on its own account, we must presume that it had some further reach.”³⁵²

Missing from Bacon’s account of the fable, and even from scholarship on the early modern fable, is a thorough exploration of its forms—its paths for expressing and creating knowledge. Ben Edwin Perry, often considered the modern author of fable theory, only makes one small and still ambiguous reference to fable’s structure: “the only thing that can be predicated categorically of the fable...is its mechanical structure as narrative, which alone remains constant throughout all the particulars and is

³⁴⁸ *AL*, 187.

³⁴⁹ *WA*, *SEH*, 13.80. He acknowledges his earlier opinion, that fables “serve to disguise and veil the meaning,” but he insists that they should no longer be used in this way (*WA*, 13.79).

³⁵⁰ *WA*, *SEH*, 13.77-8.

Scholarship on the early modern fable coheres with Bacon’s theory. A translation of the Latin *fabula*—itself a translation of the Greek *mythos*—“fable” could refer to “word,” “story,” or “myth,” and most frequently denoted a short narrative pointing to a deep philosophical truth. See Liza Blake and Kathryn Vomero Santos, introduction to *Arthur Golding’s A Moral Fabletalk and Other Renaissance Fable Translations*, ed. Liza Blake and Kathryn Vomero Santos (Cambridge: The Modern Humanities Research Association, 2017), 4; Stephens, “Bacon’s Fable-Making,” 119; Ben Edwin Perry, “Fable,” *Studium generale* 12 (1959): 17-37; Blackham, *The Fable as Literature*, ix.

³⁵¹ *NO*, ed. Jardine and Silverthorne, Bk. 1, Aphor. 122, pg. 94-5.

³⁵² *WA*, *SEH*, 13.78.

unmistakeable.”³⁵³ On the one hand, he doesn’t clarify fable’s structure precisely because he unreservedly acknowledges that variety is an inescapable condition of fable—only its “mechanical structure as narrative” remains a constant feature. On the other hand, Perry does not elaborate what the “mechanical structure”—the construction, parts, form—of fable is. All we can glean from this statement is that fable is structured as a narrative or story, but the structures of those narratives are apparently too various and diverse to describe. Stephens is slightly more prescriptive, describing that *Wisdom of the Ancients*’ fables begin with “‘quiet entry,’ a narration, and then ingeniously reduc[e] the best-known fables to aphorisms.”³⁵⁴ This description is accurate insofar as the fables contain both narration of a story and observation that explains a truth of nature, morality, or civic life. However, the sequence Stephens loosely implies—narration to aphorism—does not describe the form of every entry. Though narration and aphorism (or, in the language Bacon uses for induction—observation, interpretation, and conclusion) are all present, his imaginative texts do not put these into a consistent, repetitive sequence.

Clarifying the paths or forms Bacon utilizes to deliver knowledge in his imaginative texts is important for two reasons. First, it strengthens the case that his imaginative works express and foster variety in a way that his natural philosophical works and induction do not. Second, this work shows how poesy is a branch of learning independent from history and philosophy, a branch of learning that creates and represents knowledge in its own ways.

³⁵³ Perry, “Fable,” 17. Another declaration by Blackham that the fable is a “tactical manoeuvre to prompt new thinking” ends up being disappointingly metaphorical, as the author doesn’t elaborate what movements make up the narrative form and how the narrative leads the reader to new discoveries. See Blackham, *The Fable as Literature*, xi.

³⁵⁴ Stephens, *Francis Bacon and the Style of Science*, 125.

To begin illuminating the forms for creating and representing knowledge Bacon devises in his imaginative works, I return first to our familiar Proteus because the form of this entry is the one Bacon employs for the vast majority, twenty-three, of the other fables. The fable begins straight away with an introduction: “Proteus, the poets tell us was a herdsman to Neptune.”³⁵⁵ It continues in one paragraph describing him as a prophet-herdsman and his power and predicament as a shape-shifter. A second, final paragraph begins with a sentence indicating the topic Bacon intends the story to illuminate: “The sense of this fable relates, it would seem, to the secrets of nature and the conditions of matter.”³⁵⁶ From fables about the conditions of nature to the conditions of man, this is a familiar form. The entry on Typhon, or the Rebel, recounts in a single paragraph the parthenogenic birth of Typhon from Juno, Typhon attacking and mutilating Jupiter, and Jupiter finally killing Typhon by throwing Mount Aetna upon him. Directly following this paragraph, Bacon writes, “The fable has been composed in allusion to the variable fortune of kings and the rebellions that occur from time to time in monarchies.”³⁵⁷ The entry on Dionysus proceeds in kind, recounting the conception, gestation, education, powers, and effects of the god of desire, followed by the fable’s topic: “The fable seems to bear upon morals, and indeed there is nothing better to be found in moral philosophy. Under the person of Bacchus is described the nature of Desire, or passion and perturbation.”³⁵⁸

In this form, following the statement of the topic, the explicative paragraph or paragraphs unpack each detail from the story, typically mirroring or closely following the

³⁵⁵ *WA, SEH*, 13.116

³⁵⁶ *WA, SEH*, 13.117.

³⁵⁷ *WA, SEH*, 13.85.

³⁵⁸ *WA, SEH*, 13.139.

order in which the details appear in the narration. So, after Bacon identifies that “under the person of Proteus, Matter—the most ancient of all things, next to God—is meant to be represented,” he decodes the meaning hiding under each next detail: that Proteus is an old man, prophet, and herdsman for Neptune, that he lives under a cave, that every day at noon he counts his sheep and then falls asleep, and, of course, that he changes shapes when restrained. In the explicative paragraph Bacon interprets these details slightly out of order. First he addresses Proteus’ age: matter is “the most ancient of all things, next to God.” Next, he explains Proteus’ dwelling: “matter has its habitation under the vault of heaven, as under a cave.” Then he addresses Proteus’ servitude to Neptune, the god of seas and water, reflecting that “all the operation and dispensation of matter is effected principally in liquids.” Proteus’ herd “seems to be nothing else than the ordinary species of animals, plants, minerals, etc. in which matter may be said to diffuse and use itself up.” And as far as his daily activities, counting his herd and then sleeping:

Now this is said to take place not in the morning or in the evening, but at noon: that is to say, when the full and legitimate time has come for completing and bringing forth the species out of matter already duly prepared and predisposed, which is the middle point between the first rudiments of them and their declination.³⁵⁹

Breaking this form down to its components: we have narration of the fable, a statement of the topic, and decoding and interpreting the fable’s details to generate and support axioms about the topic—in that order. These features roughly correspond to induction’s observation, interpretation, and conclusion; yet the sequence or form clearly differ. However, while Bacon disorders the form that he argues produces the best and truest facts about nature, this disordering does not impede the result. In fact, the Proteus fable’s form encourages interpretation to percolate even before it officially engages in

³⁵⁹ *WA, SEH*, 13.117.

this work, partly because of the direct statement of the fable’s “sense,” or conclusion, at the beginning of the second paragraph—that the fable figures “the conditions of matter.”³⁶⁰ Encountering this statement directly after the fable, the reader has the opportunity to pause and speculate what characteristics of matter the fable’s details suggest before reading Bacon’s own interpretation. The meaning of some details—like his service to Neptune specifically, his dwelling under a cave, and his daily custom to count his flock and then sleep precisely at noon—might confound all but the most erudite readers, but details like his age, his knowledge of past, present, and future, and of course his shape-shifting when bound are fairly easy to decipher. His age and omniscience suggest the immortality of matter, outliving all things and omnipresent—present from the beginning of time. His shape-shifting directly signifies matter’s variable shapes. And, for those already acquainted with Bacon’s previous works, especially the *Advancement of Learning*, the fact that restraints make him transform figures Bacon’s theory of the relationship between art and nature: “Proteus [n]ever changed shapes till he was straitened and held fast; so the passages and variations of nature cannot appear so fully in the liberty of nature, as in the trials and vexations of art.”³⁶¹ Giving the reader this opportunity to pause and reflect before launching into interpretation serves the goal of this mode—a close relative to aphorism, as I have suggested—“to invite men to enquire farther” and “to contribute and add something in their turn.”³⁶²

In the explication that follows the fable and statement of topic, we see one of the principal practices of poesy at work: severing and joining. As I have explained above, I

³⁶⁰ WA, SEH, 13.117.

³⁶¹ AL, 178.

³⁶² DAS, SEH, 9.6.125.

don't mean that Bacon's poesy severs and joins parts of nature into fantastical chimeras—this kind of work and fantasy hardly appears in Bacon's imaginative texts because, as he writes in the preface to *Wisdom of the Ancients*, he views and utilizes these texts as prime and indispensable vehicles for gathering knowledge and exposing the truths of man and nature as they are. Nevertheless, the fables demonstrate that when that truth is covered over by story, Bacon accesses it by severing and joining the story's narrative. In the explicative paragraphs in entries like the Proteus one, he severs details of the fable from one another so that they no longer compose a continuous narrative, but, isolated and broken from one another, he attends to how each detail symbolizes a particular facet of matter. He sacrifices sequence, progression, and continuity to providing as full an understanding of nature as he can provide.

Where he severs and how he re-orders—the construction and form of this paragraph—reveals just as much about his focus as the content of his interpretations does. While Bacon makes one small swap by explaining Proteus' cave before explaining his service to Neptune, a second re-arrangement withholds explaining one of Proteus' most distinguishing details until the very end of Bacon's interpretation. In the first two sentences of the fable, Bacon tells us four things about Proteus: he was a herdsman; he was employed by Neptune; he was an old man; and he was a prophet—not just any prophet, but a prophet of “the very first order, and indeed thrice excellent; for he knew all three, --not the future only, but likewise the past and the present.”³⁶³ The first three descriptors Bacon decodes in order and early in his explanation; the last one he saves until the very end of the entry. He even decodes the pinnacle and final event of the

³⁶³ WA, *SEH*, 13.116.

fable—Proteus’ forced shape-shifting as matter’s ability to take on various shapes—before he explains Proteus’ omniscience. One reason Bacon might save deciphering this detail for the very end is because his interpretation of it touches on more than just matter. “[I]f a man knew the conditions, affections, and processes of matter, he would certainly comprehend the sum and general issue...of all things past, present, and to come.”³⁶⁴ At the end of this entry, Bacon raises the stakes on capturing and deciphering Proteus in all his shapes: the natural philosophers who can do this will not just learn more about what nature is made of, but they will reveal knowledge of everything across history.

By placing this detail out of order, Bacon simultaneously gives pride of place to this idea about matter existing in and transforming over a long history of existence and signals we can explore natural history out of order. We don’t need to fully understand nature’s past before understanding its present; we can and should imagine the future before knowing everything about how matter and nature work in the present. A hopeful imagining of what society can look like and what inventions are possible if philosophers adopt Baconian methodology, *New Atlantis* testifies to this idea.

The ending of the Proteus entry combines three features of Bacon’s poesy. First, it reflects narrative severing and joining: severing the details of a myth from one another so that they no longer compose a continuous narrative, but are rather historical, mythical evidence mined for their support of Bacon’s philosophy. The ending also portrays Bacon’s creative reordering of time and sequence. Though often entwined, it’s important to understand these two as separate components, especially in anticipation of studying *New Atlantis*. The events and circumstances of *Wisdom of the Ancients*’ fables take place

³⁶⁴ WA, SEH, 13.118.

in a time that is no more specific than some mythical, historical past. Nevertheless, if we read *Wisdom of the Ancients*' myths with attention to time, then we'll see different arrangements of past (myth) and present (Bacon's interpretation). In the Proteus entry, for example, Bacon recounts the whole myth (past) before a section where he toggles between past, the myth's details isolated, and present, his own interpretations. Closely related but distinct is the sequencing of this entry. Not only are past and present not linearly organized, but also, as I've shown above, Bacon departs from induction's investigative form that sequences observation, interpretation, and conclusion. However, Bacon shows here that revising this sequence does not impede his representation or creation of knowledge. In fact this deviation, putting pairs of observation and interpretation side by side, allows him to elevate the principles of nature he finds most important or anchoring.

In the second most used form for *Wisdom of the Ancients*' entries, Bacon again departs from induction's form by disclosing the central truth he means to illustrate at the very beginning; he begins at the end.³⁶⁵ The entry on Orpheus, who represents all philosophy, exemplifies this form. In a prefatory paragraph, Bacon introduces the reader to Orpheus, his powers, and what he signifies:

For Orpheus himself,--a man admirable and truly divine, who being master of all harmony subdued and drew all things after him by sweet and gentle measures,--may pass by an easy metaphor for philosophy personified. For as the works of wisdom surpass in dignity and power the works of strength, so the labours of Orpheus surpass the labours of Hercules.³⁶⁶

Not only does Bacon preempt the explanations and conclusions he'll draw later by

³⁶⁵ The entries for Actaeon and Pentheus (108-109), Daedalus (129-131), Icarus (157-8), and the Sirens (169-172) all have this same form.

³⁶⁶ WA, *SEH*, 13.110.

identifying Orpheus as “philosophy personified,” but he offers a kind of rule or axiom from the outset: philosophizing contributes more to life than manual labor does. The second paragraph then recounts the fable of Orpheus charming the underworld’s “Infernal Powers” with his music until they agree to return his wife Eurydice to him. Impatient, he violates their order not to look at her until they return to the surface. Losing Eurydice for good, Orpheus mourns her above ground by playing on his lyre, which also lulls the beasts into temporary harmony before a band of Thracian women drown out his music, undo the harmony, and tear him to pieces.

The final two paragraphs explicate the fable but do so in a way that is much less explicit and piecemeal than the Proteus entry’s corresponding paragraph. Instead of decoding the myth sentence by sentence, Bacon starts with and focuses on Orpheus’ main characteristic, his singing. Bacon states that Orpheus singing to the infernal powers signifies the practice of natural philosophy; singing to and soothing the beasts signifies the practice of moral and civil philosophy.³⁶⁷ Where in the Proteus entry Bacon very noticeably severs the details of the myth from one another to unpack them in the explicative paragraph, here, he uses the details sparingly and at opportune moments to make his initial assertion about philosophy surpassing the dignity and strength of manual labor more approachable. He’ll reference how Orpheus tames the Infernal Powers and his skill on the lyre, but he’ll leave out deciphering Orpheus’ celibacy and reclusiveness. These paragraphs do not read as a lesson in how to make a fable figure philosophy—how each detail translates his philosophy into a fantastical story—so much as they reference and insert particular details for the sake of deepening and clarifying particular principles.

³⁶⁷ WA, *SEH*, 13.111.

Bacon's selectiveness ends up being a relief because, unlike in the Proteus entry, his assertions about natural philosophy in this entry are new and obscure; they do not repeat main principles articulated in earlier texts, like the *Advancement of Learning*.³⁶⁸ Moreover, the fact that Bacon creates and represents new knowledge makes the references to the myth, however subtle, lifelines for being able to understand these principles. The myth enables us to picture examples of what the principles actually look like, even if the situations are fictitious and mythical. For example, in this entry's explicative paragraph, he writes that natural philosophy's

noblest work of all [is] nothing less than the restitution and renovation of things corruptible, and...the conservation of bodies in the state in which they are, and the retardation of dissolution and putrefaction. Now certainly if this can be effected at all, it cannot be otherwise than by due and exquisite attempering and adjustment of parts in nature, as by the harmony and perfect modulation of a lyre.³⁶⁹

The mention of "things corruptible" suggests that if we want to understand how natural philosophy restores or renovates, what this looks like, Orpheus charming the infernal and corrupting powers can help. When Orpheus plays on his lyre, he bends the infernal powers to his will. This suggests that when philosophy restores or renovates it, too, marshals disparate natural phenomena into order; philosophy organizes nature into a comprehensible system of interpretations and axioms that help guide human living. Bacon's reference to Orpheus modulating and harmonizing his lyre to find the right tune also gives a more concrete sense of natural philosophy's practices than attempering and adjusting parts of nature does. Modulating the lyre bespeaks both the necessary adjustments to physical experimentation that help produce natural philosophy and also a

³⁶⁸ See *AL*, 192-204. Though Bacon was developing his natural philosophy before the *Advancement of Learning*, this text is the first to thoroughly outline the intentions of natural philosophy.

³⁶⁹ *WA*, *SEH*, 13.111-12.

sense of the direction in which nature must be tempered and adjusted in order to preserve bodies and stave off putrefaction. Preservation can only occur if all parts of nature can be kept in harmony.

Like the Proteus entry, this entry ends with a grand statement about natural philosophy's practice, but unlike the Proteus entry, this fable's main lesson is one touted by several other fables. This commonality makes us see the volume's representation and creation of knowledge as, therefore, recursive. Directly following the simile that compares tempering and adjusting parts of nature to Orpheus modulating his lyre, Bacon bemoans why sometimes perfect, stabilizing harmony cannot be achieved: "And yet being a thing of all others the most difficult, it commonly fails of effect; and fails (it may be) from no cause more than from curious and premature meddling and impatience."³⁷⁰ While Bacon is certainly referencing Orpheus's meddling and impatience that make him look back for Eurydice before they escape hell, several other mythic figures from *Wisdom of the Ancients* exhibit this same disastrous impatience. In the Prometheus myth explaining the state of man, for example, Bacon recounts how Prometheus made man and stole fire from the chariot of the sun to give to them, which angered the other gods. Man accepts fire but turns on Prometheus, submitting him to demotion and the gods' punishment. Later man and Prometheus reconcile after man is tricked out of their two greatest gifts: not only fire but perpetual youth. Prometheus maintains his vendetta against the gods and devises a scheme for vengeance; however, Jupiter spies his craft and punishes man with Pandora as retribution.³⁷¹ Bacon interprets man and Prometheus' reconciliation in the same manner that he reads Orpheus looking back for Eurydice: a

³⁷⁰ WA, SEH, 13.112.

³⁷¹ WA, SEH, 13.144-5.

failure resulting from impatience. Just as Orpheus' impatience signifies failure when one gives up instead of patiently experimenting to discover the proper and harmonious adjustment and tempering of nature, man and Prometheus' reconciliation "alludes to the levity and rashness of men in new experiments; who if an experiment does not at once succeed according to wish, are in far too great a hurry to give up the attempt as a failure, and so tumble back to where they were and take on with the old things again."³⁷² When an experiment fails (or when man loses his gifts), man reverts back to their old ways; they stop trying to progress or patiently attempt the experiment again on their own. But their impatience and lack of fortitude eventually spell disaster as they become collateral in the conflict between Prometheus and Jupiter, having given up trying to succeed on their own. The flight of Icarus, the entry following the Prometheus myth, is another example depicting man's impatience. Bacon cites Icarus' "pride of youthful alacrity," or speedy willingness, as the reason why Icarus falls, unable to patiently maintain the middle path between the sun that will melt the wax holding his wings together or the sea vapor that would loosen their tenacity.³⁷³

The recurrence of impatience and premature meddling across multiple myths demonstrates that *Wisdom of the Ancients* does not build knowledge sequentially or progressively like induction demands. Rather, the form of the text as a whole is recursive in the sense that various and different myths lead Bacon to revisit the same material. Each loop back also demonstrates the strategic disordering of past, present, and future we witness in the Proteus entry—this time, on the level of the entire text. When we read the

³⁷² WA, *SEH*, 13.152.

³⁷³ WA, *SEH*, 13.157. See *OED* for the definition of "alacrity" as speed and willingness. "alacrity, n.," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2012, <https://www-oed-com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/Entry/4507?redirectedFrom=alacrity#eid>.

lamentations of man's impatience in Prometheus' or Icarus' entries, Bacon's previous interpretations commune with the later ones. This move is analogous to what we see in the entries, like the Proteus one, where the explicative paragraphs pull apart the myth so that historical or mythic past sits right alongside Bacon's interpretation. In a similar way, the linking of different myths through shared morals or interpretations dissolves absolute distinctions between what is past, present, and future, narratively—even formally—speaking. *Wisdom of the Ancients* demonstrates that breaking induction's rules—the rules that strive to maintain chronology and order—can be a helpful and legitimate strategy for creating and representing new knowledge.

The Temporalities of Knowledge-Making in *New Atlantis*

In the last five years of Bacon's life, he was—more acutely than at any other point in his career—engaged with the fable mode, and how fables could teach his methods for knowledge-making and interpreting nature. In addition to apparently revising the Latin version of *Wisdom of the Ancients*, he composed “The *Fable*, of the *new Atlantis*.”³⁷⁴ This provenance does not come from Bacon, himself, but from his chaplain, amanuensis and literary executor, William Rawley. Possibly precisely because Bacon composed *New Atlantis* so close to his death, it was a surprise to many readers: neither listed in the

³⁷⁴ William Rawley, *Resuscitatio, or, Bringing into publick light severall pieces of the works, civil, historical, philosophical, & theological, hitherto sleeping, of the Right Honourable Francis Bacon, Baron of Verulam, Viscount Saint Alban according to the best corrected coppies: together with His Lordships life* (London, 1657), b4v.

Also around this time, in 1619, *Wisdom of the Ancients* was translated into English by Sir Arthur Gorges. It is unclear whether Bacon oversaw this translation. Rhodri Lewis comments simply, “Translated into English by Arthur Gorges,” and F.H. Anderson uses the passive voice: “It is translated into English.” See Rhodri Lewis, “Francis Bacon, Allegory, and the Uses of Myth,” *The Review of English Studies* 61, no. 250 (2010): 364, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40783067>, and F.H. Anderson, *The Philosophy of Francis Bacon* (New York: Octagon Books, 1948), 57.

official Station's Register nor announced on the title page of the volume in which it appears (a volume prepared and published by Rawley), *New Atlantis* appears appended to Bacon's unfinished natural history, *Sylva Sylvarum*. However, in the prefatory epistle "To the Reader" of *New Atlantis*, Rawley claims that his lordship "designed [it] for this Place; In regard it hath so neare Affinity (in one Part of it) with the Preceding *Naturall History*."³⁷⁵ According to Rawley, the conditions for interpreting nature were explicitly on Bacon's mind as he wrote *New Atlantis*: "This fable my Lord devised, to the end that he might exhibit therein a model or description of a college instituted for the interpreting of nature and the producing of great and marvellous works for the benefit of men."³⁷⁶ Rawley insists that Bacon has written a fable that advertises his own method and the benefits that come from following it.

However, just like *Wisdom of the Ancients*, *New Atlantis* exhibits a method for interpreting and creating knowledge that does not follow induction's rules; rather, it leverages the flexibility of story-telling. In *New Atlantis*, Bacon constructs a story that traverses past, present, and future but one that doesn't create knowledge by respecting the sequence of past, present, and future. That is, the story—like Proteus himself, *Wisdom of the Ancients*' entry on Proteus, and other fables in the volume—disrupts the sequence of past, present, and future for the sake of aiding interpretation and learning. *New Atlantis*'s form of knowledge-creation is not linear and progressive as induction requires. This reorganization is tied directly to and permissible because of the expectations of poesy:

³⁷⁵ Francis Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum: or A natural historie In ten centuries* (London, 1627), a2r-v. For more on the provenance of *Sylva Sylvarum* and *New Atlantis*, see Doina-Cristina Rusu and Christoph Lüthy, "Extracts from a paper laboratory: the nature of Francis Bacon's *Sylva Sylvarum*," *Intellectual History Review* 27, no. 2 (2017): 171-202, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496977.2017.1292020>.

³⁷⁶ NA, 785.

that it is not beholden to nature's order or philosophy's restraints, that it is the result of "freely ranging only within the zodiac of [one's] own wit."³⁷⁷ Reorganizing chronology and progression in the knowledge-making process is the poet's prerogative.

While *Wisdom of the Ancients* and *New Atlantis* share a proclivity for producing new and various forms of creating and representing knowledge, *New Atlantis*' genre, its construction, and even its approach to combining fiction and natural philosophy differ from *Wisdom of the Ancients*'—evidence that Bacon strives to live up to his own mandate that poesy traffics in absolute variety. Unlike *Wisdom of the Ancients*, *New Atlantis* is a single, sustained story, and it is not allegorical or mythical in same ways *Wisdom of the Ancients* is: its characters are shipwrecked sailors and inhabitants of a secluded and utopian island, New Atlantis. Though impressively advanced in their inventions, the New Atlantans (or Bensalemites) aren't magical or super-human—just, purportedly, expert students of nature. Their inventions offer a glimpse into the sailors'—and the seventeenth-century reader's—potential futures as Bacon elevates the Bensalemites as inventors of things like the telephone, gramophone, lasers, and organ transplantation. In terms of its engagement with natural philosophy, *New Atlantis* does not strive to explain natural philosophical principles through story—that is, an interpreter does not unpack how the details of a story correspond to or signal underlying truths about nature. Instead, the most straightforwardly natural philosophical part of *New Atlantis* is its inventions, the products of knowing and harnessing nature's powers. Bensalem represents a society to which to aspire, one that has apparently—though this is never confirmed or demonstrated—followed Bacon's program for revealing nature's operations. In turn,

³⁷⁷ See Sidney, *Defence*, 8-9.

members of an elite and somewhat secretive body called “Salomon’s House” have been able to artificially reproduce and even improve those operations.

Though most readers see this short-story or fable as an early piece of science-fiction because of just the last one-fourth, where the Father of Salomon’s House lists for the narrator an impressive number of accomplishments the society has achieved, just listing new accomplishments does not illustrate the development of any scientific thought or method. This is not to discount list-making as a valid scientific practice in the early modern period. Listing spurred thinking about the implicit links between items—causations, correlations and the like. It also particularly suited Bacon’s natural philosophical method because it reinforced the “logic of progressive temporality.”³⁷⁸ However, in this instance, the list-maker is not the groping natural philosopher—the one all of a sudden confronted with discoveries out of which they try to make some sort of harmonious whole or philosophy of nature.³⁷⁹ The list-maker is someone who presents themselves as a master of nature and knowledge, constantly reminding the listener that the House’s inventions are “to you unknown,” “which you have not,” “far greater” or “more than you have.”³⁸⁰ But, again, these assertions of having more greatness, goodness, and variety than what the narrator knows does not reveal a method for achieving such things. Indeed, Harry Levin captures the true attitude of Salomon’s House when he describes it as “more like a museum than a laboratory.”³⁸¹ The former focuses on

³⁷⁸ See Kelly, “‘Experience has not yet learned her letters’,” 147. See also James Delbourgo and Staffan Müller-Wille, “Introduction,” in “Listmania,” ed. James Delbourgo and Staffan Müller-Wille, special issue, *Isis* 103, no. 4 (2012): 710-715, esp. 711, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/669045>.

³⁷⁹ Pérez-Ramos, *Francis Bacon’s Idea of Science*, 40.

³⁸⁰ *NA*, 483-5.

³⁸¹ Harry Levin, “Bacon’s Poetics,” *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 39, no. 3 (1985): 11, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20171805>. See also Simon Wortham, “Censorship and the Institution of Knowledge in Bacon’s *New Atlantis*,” in *Francis Bacon’s New Atlantis: New*

presenting a product; the latter revels in and shares the process of creation.

If readers limit the examples of “scientific thought” to this last part of the fable, then really the text does not deserve the great attention it has been given as an example of developing scientific thought. However, if we apply the period-appropriate conception of science as *scientia*, knowledge-in-general, to the text, we see that actually there are many demonstrations of developing, creating, and representing knowledge that have very little to do with the text’s exploration or representation of natural philosophy or inventions.

In this section, I focus on other moments of knowledge development, not the encounter with the Father, that exhibit the knowledge-making method Bacon develops in this text. However, I want to offer that the non-linear form of interpretation and knowledge-creation in the instances I’ll read below—instances where nature isn’t necessarily the subject of interpretation or explication—suggests that the Bensalemites might actually use a more flexible and varying method than induction for interpreting and harnessing nature’s powers. That is, while the Father does not apprise the narrator of the society’s precise natural philosophical methods—*how* they gather information and experiment in order to produce their novelties—if we extrapolate from other parts of the fable where the method for knowledge-creation is displayed, there is evidence that Salomon’s House is not only advanced in their inventions but also in their methodology. That is, their natural philosophical method may not be as singular and inflexible as induction is. In fact, the Father’s repeated use of “variety” or “divers” when describing the House’s accomplishments suggests variety or diversity in their natural philosophical method as well. These signal words for poesy’s methods accompany almost every

interdisciplinary essays, esp. 187. Levin rightly points out that “we are occasionally told *what* is done, but rarely *how* it is done” (original italics).

invention. Therefore, what if, like their story-telling, the Bensalemites' natural philosophical method doesn't follow one form only? What if, even more particularly, their method for understanding and improving upon nature, like their story-telling, is non-linear and non-sequential? What if the methods Bacon uses for fictional story-telling are supposed to presage future natural philosophical practices?

From its beginning, the fable requires readers to become comfortable with a non-linear interpretive method because the narrator tells the story from some unknown time in the future, after the events of the story have transpired. Overwhelmingly, the narrator uses past tense to narrate approximately the first three weeks of interacting with the Bensalemites, beginning with, "We sailed from Peru."³⁸² This choice frames the knowledge represented as finalized—or at the very least deliberated and benefitting from a degree of distance and time that would allow re-interpretation or revision. Thus, *New Atlantis* makes its reader aware of the temporality of knowledge (and the method for developing it) in a way that *Wisdom of the Ancients* or any of Bacon's natural philosophies—*Advancement of Learning*, *Novum Organum*, *De Augmentis Scientiarum*—do not. In these texts—with the exception of recounting the details of a myth—there is very little narrative apparatus; therefore, the interpretations in these texts appear as if they're occurring in the literary present. In *New Atlantis*, telling the story from the future is a choice that highlights the fact that the narrator has had the time and opportunity to decide how he wants to represent the interpretive and knowledge-making process. Remixing past, present, and future look, therefore, like a deliberate choice—one made because it supports Bacon's strategies for knowledge-production.

³⁸² NA, 457.

One of the extra affordances of telling the story from the future is the opportunity for a kind of prolepsis that assures the reader of the narrator's knowledge and interpretation. Landing near the foreign island, the sailors are quickly met by its inhabitants whose methods of communication and dress are not altogether familiar. Though the sailors and Bensalemites are able to communicate in a shared language, Spanish, the narrator remarks about Bensalemites' strange gestures, like lifting the right hand towards heaven and drawing it softly to the mouth when the sailors reassure the islanders that they are Christians. Directly after describing this gesture, the narrator interjects with an explanation: "(which is the gesture they use when they thank God)."³⁸³ This sudden and attention-seeking change in tense draws the reader out of the past and into the future the narrator inhabits, from which he confidently deciphers the meaning of a gesture he could only describe when he first saw it. This is a strategy analogous to what Bacon does in *Wisdom of the Ancients* when he dissects the historical details from one another and draws out their meaning for his natural philosophy: he unites two tenses, the past and the present, sacrificing sequence and continuity to a full understanding. Here, past, present, and future are united as the narrator uses the benefit of continued interaction with the Bensalemites to help the reader understand this unfamiliar society in a way the narrator did not at first. This kind of clarifying interruption violates the strict progression to which induction adheres. In an inductive process, the narrator would do something like record whenever he sees the Bensalemites make this gesture and differentiate it from gestures they make in different situations. His interpretation and explanation would not come for some time and only after persistent, demonstrated

³⁸³ NA, 459.

observation.

These and other interjections from the narrator, especially when describing the very early contacts with the Bensalemites, don't just unite past, present, and future, but they make it difficult to distinguish between past, present, and future. The interjections come from a time that is future of the events the narrator relates, but his explanations are often in the present tense: "when they *thank* God," "which is their gesture when they *bid* any welcome" (explaining the islanders sticking their arms out of their house when the sailors pass by).³⁸⁴ In one of these explanations, the narrator suggests that he even continues to learn in his present/future moment. To thank one of the Bensalemites who informs the sailors that they will be sheltered and fed on the island, the sailors try to offer the representative a gift of pistols. He smiles and responds, "'He must not be twice paid for one labour:,'" which the narrator speculates means, "(as I take it) that he had salary sufficient of the state for his service. For (as I after learned) they call an officer that taketh rewards, 'twice paid'." ³⁸⁵ It's difficult to classify this moment in one way, as an eruption by the present or by the future—it's both: "As I take it" is another comment in present tense from future of the moment in which the exchange occurred. Neither definitively future or present, this moment, therefore, undermines temporal order in the interpretive process. It exemplifies how the text muddies the discreteness of past, present, and future—the discreteness that ensures progression. Nevertheless, while the time of this interpretation is unclear, the interpretation itself is clear and reasonable, which suggests that this retrospective but also multitemporal form of creating knowledge (bringing together multiple and sometimes indistinct times of past, present, and future) is

³⁸⁴ NA, 460.

³⁸⁵ NA, 459.

nevertheless fruitful.

The second parenthetical remark causes another wrinkle in this form. “([A]s I after learned)” indicates that after this interaction and before the present/future moment, the narrator learned about the society’s custom that officers not take rewards because, he believes, the state pays them sufficiently. Coming to this conclusion requires him to interpret a fact: the state calls officers who take rewards, “twice paid.” What we are seeing, then, is the narrator recounting how he follows an inductive interpretive process, from data to interpretation. Yet, “(as I take it)” indicates that the narrator remains in a state of uncertainty: so he is, in fact, *in the middle of* an inductive interpretive process, on his way to his final, proven axiom. Regardless of the fact that we see a glimmer of induction, this aside interrupts and stymies the plot’s forward momentum as we get caught in a tangle of him recounting an ongoing interpretation carrying out in the future, informed by something the narrator learns after an initial past interaction. Bacon is clearly building an interpretive scheme that capitalizes on fiction’s unique prerogative to transgress the rules of natural time—jump into the future, jump back to the past, jump to an intermediate past—in its production of knowledge.

When other scholars have attended to *New Atlantis*’ confounding narrative time, by and large, they explain it as a consequence of the text’s supposed genre, utopia. *New Atlantis* has been called a utopia because it illustrates the social harmony and scientific advancements that isolation from adversaries and supposedly following Bacon’s natural philosophical methods will produce.³⁸⁶ However, scholars don’t necessarily agree on one

³⁸⁶ See a selection: Denise Albanese, “*New Atlantis* and the Uses of Utopia,” *ELH* 57, no. 3 (1990): 503-28, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2873232>; Judah Bierman, “The *New Atlantis*, Bacon’s Utopia of Science,” *Papers on Language and Literature* 3, no. 2 (1967): 99-110; Ian Box, *The Social Thought of Francis Bacon* (Lewiston, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 129; Angus Fletcher, “Francis Bacon’s Literary-Scientific

way of thinking about utopia's narrative time. "Utopia" comes from the Greek meaning "no where," and some have developed a complementary argument that utopias also occur out of time, "no-when."³⁸⁷ Correspondingly, Ian Box argues that Bensalem is "ahistoric," "situated in neither the distant future nor the remote past but in a seemingly timeless present."³⁸⁸ However, the narrator's and other story-teller's keen awareness of past, present, and future and their insistence on situating everything in past, present, or future presents a strong counter-argument to the idea that *New Atlantis* is ahistoric or timeless. Indeed, contra Box, Louis Marin argues that "utopia is...seized and shot through with the category of time."³⁸⁹

New Atlantis evinces its tremendous concern for time with frequent remarks about the passing of time. On the first page of the story, alone, the narrator marks time on eight separate occasions. Sailing from Peru, where the crew stayed "one whole year," they take supplies with them for "twelve months." After smooth sailing for "five months' space or more," the wind blows from the unfavorable western side "for many days." Running out of supplies, the sailors pray to God and are saved on "the next day, about evening," when they spy clouds that indicate land nearby. "All that night and in the dawning of the next day" they sail in that direction, and after another "hour and a half's sailing" they finally

Utopia," in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Early Modern Literature and Science*, 73-91; Marina Leslie, *Renaissance Utopias and the Problem of History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), esp. 83; Frank E. Manuel and Fritz P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 243-260; Stephens, *Francis Bacon and the Style of Science*, 124; J. Weinberger, "Science and Rule in Bacon's Utopia: An Introduction to the Reading of the *New Atlantis*," *The American Political Science Review* 70, no. 3 (September 1976): 865-885, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1959872>.

³⁸⁷ See Kelly, "'Experience has not yet learned her letters,'" 163 for this neologism.

³⁸⁸ Box, *The Social Thought of Francis Bacon*, 128. Box argues that because the events and interpretations of *New Atlantis* seem to take place in a timeless present, the text is not meant to be part of Bacon's overall natural philosophical instauration. "[T]he timelessness of utopia is out of character with [Bacon's] scientific programme": "the instauration is oriented to the future in a way that *New Atlantis* is not."

³⁸⁹ Louis Marin, *Utopics: Spatial Play*, trans. Robert A. Vollrath (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1984), xxiii.

enter Bensalem's port.³⁹⁰ This specificity continues for the entire narrative. Between the narrator's and Bensalemites' specificity, one scholar has even calculated that the sailor's voyage takes place in 1612:

If the 'six score years' since navigation has begun to increase be reckoned from the obvious beginning of European navigation, 1492, the sailor's voyage takes places in 1612. The time referred to as 'three thousand years ago' would, then, be 1388 B.C., 458 years before the biblical Solomon completed the temple in 930 B.C., and the date of king Solamona's reign, which brought Salomon's House, would be 288 B.C.³⁹¹

Attuned to both *New Atlantis*' obsession with time and its genre, Erin Kathleen Kelly conducts one of the most thorough explorations of how the text's fluctuating narrative time and scale—bouncing between millennia, narrating thousands of years alongside the events of just a few hours—is in fact a signal quality of utopia. She observes that “Utopia has mixed roots in millennial, typological prophecy that imagines the return of Edenic prosperity on Earth as well as in travel narratives...each of these traditions employs a distinct temporal mode.”³⁹² *New Atlantis* honors its roots in millennialism in its lengthy middle part, where the narrator recounts learning about the history of the island—including the islander's conversion to Christianity—from the Governor of the Strangers' House in which the sailors reside. The Governor replaces the narrator as story-teller from the future, beginning his story ““About twenty years after the ascension of our Saviour,”” when the islanders witnessed, in the middle of the sea, a bright cylinder with a resplendent cross on top rise up towards heaven.³⁹³ After the light disappears a cedar chest is left bobbing in its place, containing a letter from Bartholomew, one of Jesus' apostles, and the books of the Old and New Testament as

³⁹⁰ *NA*, 457.

³⁹¹ Weinberger, “Science and Rule in Bacon's Utopia,” 877.

³⁹² Kelly, ““Experience has not yet learned her letters’,” 163.

³⁹³ *NA*, 464.

well as some books of the New Testament “which were not at that time [twenty years after the ascension] written.”³⁹⁴

Here, the Governor mimics the narrator’s attitude and process when he recounts the past. Just like the narrator, the Governor speaks proleptically—for example, when he clarifies that the Old and New Testament they received was ““according as you have them, (for we know well what the Churches with you receive).””³⁹⁵ It’s not just that, as Kelly observes, “linear plot all but disappears” when the Governor recounts this history, but the Governor’s comments exhibit the text’s distinct form of knowledge-making that relies on interruptions from the future to clarify the past.³⁹⁶ The Governor only knows what Biblical books and knowledge the outside world had at that time because of exploration that occurred—and continues to occur—after they received the books. Again, the present tense interruption of a story told mostly in past tense, “for we *know* well what the Churches with you *receive*,” demonstrates a method for creating knowledge that violates sequential and progressive knowledge-making. Again, the text privileges understanding over prescribed sequence. That is, for the sake of understanding, the Governor deliberately violates induction’s method that requires the explorer to show his work in a sequence that follows the order of natural time—from his oldest to newest observations, building toward a conclusion or axiom. Instead, the Governor uses fiction’s prerogative to defy nature’s order: he confirms the state of the past from the future with

³⁹⁴ NA, 465. Though it does not fit with my current focus, the temporality of knowledge-making, it is nevertheless worth noting the abundance of artifacts in this moment presenting a variety of different moments in time: the “canonical” Old and New Testaments (written sometime in the intervening 20 years), New Testament books that were not yet written in those 20 years, and Bartholomew’s letter, also written sometime in the intervening 20 years but after the Old and New Testaments (and also somehow aware of the future New Testament books).

³⁹⁵ NA, 465.

³⁹⁶ Kelly, “‘Experience has not yet learned her letters’,” 166.

knowledge acquired over a period of time not narrated.

Thus far the clarification of the past from the future has been rather heavy-handed: the interruptions have been explicitly marked with changes in verb tense or punctuation. However, when the Governor recounts a fuller history of the island (focusing especially on its seclusion), he includes a small detail from New Atlantan history that works in the same way as the earlier interruptions—it clarifies a past moment—but its temporality is far more complicated. Bacon presents yet another form of knowledge-making that defies induction’s requirement for linear progression.

The Governor begins this next history lesson “three thousand years ago, or somewhat more”—even further back in time than the New Atlantans’ conversion to Christianity. However, despite again not moving the plot forward, the form of the history lesson is in some ways like induction’s form in that the Governor recounts a linear—and astoundingly detailed—history.³⁹⁷ Once quite involved in sea-trade and frequented by visitors, New Atlantis’ exchange with and openness to outsiders wanes after the combination of a failed attempt by their nearest trading partners to conquer them, a flood that brings “Divine Revenge” for this transgression reduces the population and adventures of said society, and all states around the world reduce their number of sea voyages.³⁹⁸ The Governor then jumps forward about a millennium to a mere “nineteen hundred years ago” when King Solamona reigned. Retelling Solamona’s accomplishments, he clarifies something that happens earlier in *New Atlantis*’ narrative.³⁹⁹ In addition to ordering the creation of Salomon’s House, King Solamona was

³⁹⁷ NA, 467.

³⁹⁸ NA, 468-9.

³⁹⁹ NA, 469.

also responsible for “the interdicts and prohibitions which we have touching entrance of strangers,” which, the Governor admits, the sailors “have tasted.”⁴⁰⁰ The Governor’s remark clarifies the origin and intention of the islanders’ seemingly strange behaviors earlier in the narrative. In one sense, then, this moment is like the previous interruptions from the future in that—though there is no change in tense—this detail explains some past occurrence.

But is “past” the right label for what narratively precedes the Governor’s history lesson and “future” the right label for the information relayed in that history lesson? Unlike the previous examples—the narrator’s explanation of the islanders’ gesture or the islanders’ knowledge of what books of the Bible the outside world had at a particular time—Solamona’s interdictions and prohibitions don’t qualify as knowledge acquired from future interactions. This is very old knowledge, now coming to light after the encounter between the sailors and islanders. The situation or timeliness of this revelation is different from previous ones: the Governor does not offer this explanation in the moment when it is most needed; he offers it much later in the narrative. Therefore, it is at once situated properly in New Atlantan history, unveiled in proper sequence when recounting Solamona’s reign, but also out of joint with the text’s diegesis: the sailors’ treatment is explained after their confinement. In one sense, then, this revelation forms the same knowledge-making motion as the earlier examples: knowledge acquired later clarifies something that happens earlier. However, in this particular case, the earlier narrative moment occurs later in historical time. The sailors’ confinement, then, is narratively past but historically future of the time when Solamona decrees their treatment.

⁴⁰⁰ NA, 470.

That the sailors' confinement can be interpreted as both past and future is just another kind of variability Bacon expects from poesy.

I think there is another very familiar reason why Bacon makes it difficult to label the temporality of events and interpretations in this story: he is imitating matter's protean nature. Leaving the temporality of this moment and others flexible, Bacon is not only imitating nature, but he is making a case that mapping nature—its processes and powers—should preserve its variability and flexibility. With varying forms of knowledge-making, *New Atlantis* demonstrates how that can be done. Indeed, Bacon's experiments with the temporality of knowledge-making in this text achieve and endorse heterogeneity in the act of scientific inquiry by transforming the very form of scientific inquiry and representation. These experiments suggest, furthermore, that he believed scientific inquiry was not a monolith. To explore the varieties of forms and representations of knowledge, it is only appropriate that he would turn to poesy, the genre that traffics in "absolute variety."⁴⁰¹

It is curious that though Bacon admits that poesy's purpose and license is to generate absolute variety, he does not dwell on the fact that this central quality requires methods for knowledge-making that run counter to the method he painstakingly endorses in his natural philosophies. And yet, *Wisdom of the Ancients* and *New Atlantis* indisputably engage in the same study and explanation of nature while also presenting new forms for how knowledge, in general, can be generated and presented. I hope that this chapter's central idea—that Bacon turns to imaginative writing in order to invent and experiment with different forms of knowledge-making and knowledge-representation—

⁴⁰¹ *AL*, 186

has brought more definition to the often vague way scholarship refers to the relationship between poesy and natural philosophy from this period. Poesy does not just “develop” or “aid” scientific thought.⁴⁰² I don’t deny that Bacon’s imaginative texts, especially *New Atlantis*, aid his overall philosophical project, but I hope to have clarified the distinct means—that is distinct from natural philosophy—by which his poesy enables discovery and represents that knowledge.

Bacon’s hesitance to diagnose his own poetic methods means that he also does not account for how poesy’s license to create absolute variety impinges upon poesy as imitation. However, in their forms for representing and creating knowledge, *Wisdom of the Ancients* and *New Atlantis* imitate nature’s own disorderly processes of creation—the twists and turns that making something *new* requires. This conception of poetic mimesis does not end with Bacon. Margaret Cavendish, a fellow believer in nature’s tendency toward variety, openly defines her poesy as imitating nature’s variety so closely that her poesy creates its own nature through very particular disordering practices. Turning now to Cavendish, I turn to an author who does not, as Bacon does, uphold natural philosophy as the best way to understand and disclose nature’s variety. Cavendish shares this work between natural philosophy and poesy, while also redefining the longstanding expectation and understanding that poesy simply imitates nature.

⁴⁰² This specific language is Vickers’—*NA*, 787—and Cowan’s, “Imagination’s Arts,” 143. Readings of *New Atlantis* that emphasize it as a blueprint for Bacon’s ideal future society, including its social and scientific practices, often end up assuming that *New Atlantis* must be espousing the same methodology as Bacon’s natural philosophy without often properly investigating whether that is true. See Robert K. Faulkner, *Francis Bacon and the Project of Progress* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1993), esp. 239; Salzman, “Narrative Contexts for Bacon’s *New Atlantis*,” 44; Weinberger, “Science and Rule in Bacon’s Utopia,” 876.

Margaret Cavendish's Vitalist Poetics

Margaret Cavendish was a picture and purveyor of variety: a natural philosopher, self-described “poetress,”⁴⁰³ biographer, playwright, and romancical-philosophical-fantastical prose-writer, not only did she believe that nature tended toward variety, but she invested variety in all aspects of her work and writing. Across three texts of “Pure Natural Philosophy,”⁴⁰⁴ and in countless places in her more fanciful texts, she repeats her belief about nature—but never in the exact same words. In *Philosophical Letters* (1664), a collection of unsent letters responding to her contemporaries’ theories of nature, she writes, “there is so much variety in Nature, proceeding from the self-motion of Matter, as not possible to be numbred, nor thorowly known by any Creature.”⁴⁰⁵ And in her last natural philosophy, *Grounds of Natural Philosophy* (1668), she avers, “by reason Nature is a perpetual motion, she must of necessity cause infinite Varieties.”⁴⁰⁶ Likewise, her fictions—which she more often calls, “fancies”—both poetry and prose alike, cultivate variety. In a preface to her first published text, *Poems, and Fancies* (1653), she hopes that if the individual pieces do not please the reader, the collection’s variety will, “for most Palates are greedy after Change.”⁴⁰⁷ Later in the same volume she makes it patently clear that fancy—especially poetry—traffics in variety, writing,

⁴⁰³ See the titles of two prefatory poems to *Poems, and Fancies*, “The Poetresses hasty Resolution” and “The Poetresses Petition.” Margaret Cavendish, *Poems, and Fancies* (London, 1653), n.p. Hereafter, *Poems, and Fancies* is abbreviated *P&F*.

⁴⁰⁴ Margaret Cavendish, “An Epistle to the Reader,” in *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (London, 1663), b2v. Hereafter *PPO*.

By the 1650s, when Cavendish began publishing, “natural philosophy” had been fractured into two kinds of practices. One practice, one Cavendish criticized, was experimental; the other, the one Cavendish practiced, did not manipulate nature—it was more passively observational. Both practices, however, ceased to follow an Aristotelian episteme of cause and effect, which dominated earlier—even earlier seventeenth-century—natural philosophy.

⁴⁰⁵ Margaret Cavendish, *Philosophical Letters* (London, 1664), 200. Hereafter *PL*.

⁴⁰⁶ Margaret Cavendish, *Grounds of Natural Philosophy* (London, 1668), 6. Hereafter *GNP*.

⁴⁰⁷ Cavendish, “To Naturall Philosophers,” in *P&F*, n.p.

most Pleasure doth the Poets give;
If Pleasures in Variety do live.⁴⁰⁸

Indeed, *Poems, and Fancies*, like many of Cavendish's texts, is generically- and topically-diverse. Poems, prose essays, letters, short stories, and something resembling a masque address topics from the motion of atoms to the ruin of Britain as a result of the ongoing Civil War. A few years later, Cavendish underscores her commitment to serving variety in fiction by announcing on the title page of *Natures Pictures* (1656) that it is a volume of

several feigned Stories of Natural Descriptions, as Comical, Tragical, and Tragi-Comical, Poetical, Romancical, Philosophical, and Historical, both in Prose and Verse, some all Verse, some all Prose, some mixt, partly Prose, and partly Verse. Also, there are some Morals, and some Dialogues.⁴⁰⁹

In Cavendish's career-long fascination with variety, she will indulge in generic variety, especially in ways that transgress conventions about what textual forms are suitable for what topics. Her language, too, will demonstrate her commitment to variety: from double entendre to varying, genre-specific vocabulary to describe the same idea.

Cavendish's linguistic playfulness is evident, for example, in the word "pastime," an idea she associates with her fancies. In the same preface to *Poems, and Fancies* where she writes about satiating greedy palates, she theorizes poetry as "Pastime": accommodating of error and not intended to articulate truth.⁴¹⁰ But she also capitalizes on the play of idleness and activity that the word evokes. In a different preface to *Poems, and Fancies*, she preemptively defends herself against attacks levied at her for writing by insisting that her text is "the harmlessest Pastime," "an Account to my Friends, how I

⁴⁰⁸ Cavendish, "Poets have most Pleasure in this Life," in *P&F*, 152.

⁴⁰⁹ Margaret Cavendish, *Natures Pictures drawn by Fancies Pencil to the Life* (London, 1656), t.p. Hereafter *NP*.

⁴¹⁰ Cavendish, "To Naturall Philosophers," in *P&F*, n.p.

spend the idle Time of my life, and how I busie my Thoughts, when I thinke upon the Objects of the World”—the most anodyne thing she can do instead of merely sitting still.⁴¹¹ Though Cavendish associates pastime with idleness, she also insists that the text illustrates the exact opposite of idleness: how she busies her thoughts. Further, she implicitly acknowledges writing as an act when she frames writing the volume as something to do *instead* of sitting still, “Worke [that] is better then to sit still.”⁴¹² Dedicated to Pastime, *Natures Pictures* also acknowledges that pastime does not exclude work:

When idle, then my Readers in't may look
 ...My readers all, in every piece to learn
 Something to lay up still in mem'ries Treasure.⁴¹³

Though readers may pick up the volume idly, she hopes reading it will galvanize them to act: to save and set aside, “lay up,” images and ideas into their memories. Yet busying thoughts and laying up images convey a sense of pastime as not just an action, but a motion: the kinetic movement of thoughts and the transference of an idea into the mind’s permanent collection.⁴¹⁴ These motions shore up the motion inherent in “pastime” itself: *pass* the time. Writing or reading these texts passes the time or helps time to pass. Therefore, alongside its significations as both idleness and busy work, pastime is a motion.

Recognizing pastime as a motion and variety and pastime as principles of Cavendish’s poetic theory—a theory of poesy, not exclusive to poetry—illuminates the

⁴¹¹ Cavendish, “An Epistle to Mistris Toppe,” in *P&F*, n.p.

⁴¹² Cavendish, “An Epistle to Mistris Toppe,” in *P&F*, n.p.

⁴¹³ Cavendish, “The Dedication,” in *NP*, n.p.

⁴¹⁴ See Liza Blake, “The Grounds of Literature and Science: Margaret Cavendish’s Creature Manifesto,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Early Modern Literature and Science*, 3-26, esp. 9.

current of Cavendish's natural philosophy running through her fancies. Cavendish belongs to the school of "vitalist materialism," a philosophy with the slogan that Nature is made of one, self-moving matter—of infinite degrees, infinite motions, and infinite parts.⁴¹⁵ Cavendish eventually transitions to describing matter as "corporeal figurative motion," thus emphasizing the oneness of matter and motion—matter is motion.⁴¹⁶ "Pastime" perfectly illustrates this co-extensiveness; it signifies substance, a kind of writing, as well as the motion of passing time. Thus, continually associating fancy with "pastime" indicates that she invests her fancies with the same duality at the heart of her natural philosophy: the identicalness of matter and motion. Fancy is a motion.

The preceding paragraph teases an approach to Cavendish's work that has been immensely productive: how her natural philosophy informs her fiction-making, and, conversely, how her fiction affects her natural philosophy.⁴¹⁷ Within this approach,

⁴¹⁵ Cavendish, "Of the Degrees, Changes, Parts, Divisions and Compositions in Infinite Matter," in *PPO*, 6.

"Vitalist materialism" is a twentieth-century term which describes the subset of materialist philosophy that believes matter has a self-organizing spirit very similar to a consciousness. Henri Bergson described this spirit as "élan vital." See Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911). Other terms scholars have used to describe Cavendish's materialism include "anthropomorphic naturalis[m]" (Karen Detlefsen, "Reason and Freedom: Margaret Cavendish on the Order and Disorder of Nature," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 89, no. 2 [2007]: 188, <https://doi.org/10.1515/AGPH.2007.008>); "panpsychism" (Jacqueline Broad, "Is Margaret Cavendish Worthy of Study Today?," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part A* 42, no. 3 [2011]: 459, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.shpsa.2011.02.004>); "organicist materialism" (David Skrbina, *Panpsychism in the West* [Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2005], 86); and "materialist panpsychism" (Stewart Duncan, "Debating Materialism: Cavendish, Hobbes, and More," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 29, no. 4 [2012]: 393, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43488051>). See Deborah Boyle, *The Well-Ordered Universe: The Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 19n.39.

⁴¹⁶ On the early modern period's conception of form as functional, that is, as not something static but rather prone to transformation, see Mann and Sarkar, "Introduction," esp. 5 and 6. Mann and Sarkar exemplify the tendencies of a new wave of attention to form, sometimes called, "new formalism." They assert that in the early modern period, "form" connoted change: "a way of describing active procedures rather than static products." They identify the idea of form in early modern literature and science as—like "pastime"—a substantive noun whose substance is motion: an "ongoing interaction of becoming and being."

⁴¹⁷ Staples in this arena include Lisa T. Sarasohn, *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish: Reason and Fancy in the Scientific Revolution* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010) and G. Gabrielle Starr, "Cavendish, Aesthetics, and the Anti-Platonic Line," in "New Feminist Work in Epistemology and Aesthetics," special issue, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39, no. 3 (2006): 295-308, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30053472>. Newer and notable pieces include Matthew J. Rigilano, "Embodying the Invisible: Materiality and Subjectivity in Cavendish, Manley, and Haywood," *The*

scholars, such as Angus Fletcher, Sylvia Bowerbank, and John Shanahan, have paid particular and enlightening attention to how Cavendish's fictional style mirrors the unease, unregulated motion, and defiance of hierarchy that accompanies a philosophy of infinite motion.⁴¹⁸ Even more particularly, Stephen Hequembourg and Anne M. Thell are among the few who consider the effects of Cavendish's natural philosophy, specifically its commitment to unregulated motion, on the *practices* of fiction-making. Hequembourg acknowledges the challenge Cavendish faces as a vitalist materialist, balancing nature's self-motion with the author's desire to control their creative process and message.⁴¹⁹ Thell reads Cavendish's use of the travel genre, most obviously in *The Blazing World* (1666), as a signal that Cavendish thinks of imaginative work as self-directed motion: "Taking motion as its most basic criterion, the travel genre thematizes movement and for Cavendish allows the representability of a universe in constant, self-directed flux."⁴²⁰

However, no one has yet attempted to explain Cavendish's theory of poesy or her specific fancy-making practices in the light of her theory of infinite and various

Eighteenth Century 57, no.1 (2016): 71-93, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/eighcent.57.1.71>; Riccardo Capoferro, "Imaginary Voyages' Aesthetic Theories: Towards a Definition of the Fantastic," in *Britain and Italy in the Long Eighteenth Century: Literary and Art Theories*, ed. Rosamaria Loretelli and Frank O'Gorman (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 156-64, esp. 160; Aaron R. Hanlon, "Margaret Cavendish's Anthropocene Worlds," *New Literary History* 47, no. 1 (2016): 49-66, [10.1353/nlh.2016.0004](https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2016.0004); and Jessie Hock, "Fanciful Poetics and Skeptical Epistemology in Margaret Cavendish's *Poems and Fancies*," *Studies in Philology* 115, no.4 (2018): 766-802, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/90025019>.

⁴¹⁸ On Cavendish's style, See Angus Fletcher, "The Irregular Aesthetic of The Blazing-World," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 47, no.1 (2007): 123-41, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4127496>; Sylvia Bowerbank, "The Spider's Delight: Margaret Cavendish and the 'Female' Imagination," *English Literary Renaissance* 14, no. 3 (1984): 392-408, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6757.1984.tb00872.x>; John Shanahan, "From Drama to Science: Margaret Cavendish as Vanishing Mediator," *Literature Compass* 5, no. 2 (2008): 362-75, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2008.00526.x>; and Richard Nate, "'Plain and Vulgarly Express'd': Margaret Cavendish and the Discourse of the New Science," *Rhetorica* 19, no. 4 (2001): 403-17, <https://doi.org/10.1525/rh.2001.19.4.403>.

⁴¹⁹ Stephen Hequembourg, "The Poetics of Materialism in Cavendish and Milton," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 54, no.1 (2014): 178, 175, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sel.2014.0000>.

⁴²⁰ Anne M. Thell, "'[A]s lightly as two thoughts': Motion, Materialism, and Cavendish's *Blazing World*," *Configurations* 23, no.1 (2015): 3, 6, [10.1353/con.2015.0001](https://doi.org/10.1353/con.2015.0001).

motion.⁴²¹ This chapter aims to redress this omission by showing that Cavendish employs three specific motions in her fancies to achieve variety: recreation, diversion, and withdrawal.⁴²² I argue that centering this goal—variety—and utilizing these practices—recreation, diversion, and withdrawal—Cavendish’s fancies challenge earlier conceptions of poesy—particularly the idea that poesy is an imitative and resemblance-based practice. Fancy’s evasion is wholly consistent with Cavendish’s conception of nature as constantly, and occasionally unpredictably, changing. Thus, Cavendish’s fancy rather stages poetic mimesis as a kind of disorder—creating anew involves deliberate breaks from, movements away from, what is seen in nature, but also generally away from what came before.

I begin this chapter by situating Cavendish’s conception of language within the materialist theories that influenced her. I then gloss Cavendish’s idiosyncratic conceptions of how language moves in fanciful texts. This includes a surprising distinction between imitation and fancy. Additionally, I explain not only how she conceives of and illustrates fancy as recreation, diversion, and withdrawal, but also why

⁴²¹ In the introduction to her digital critical edition of *Poems, and Fancies*, Liza Blake does, however, spend ample and careful attention on the volume’s poetic modes and techniques. She concludes, “Part I of *Poems and Fancies*, with its several short poems about atoms, demands the reader think poetry and natural philosophy together, in ways that have still yet to be entirely explored.” This chapter responds to Blake’s invitation. See Liza Blake, “Reading Poems (and Fancies): An Introduction to Margaret Cavendish’s *Poems and Fancies*,” in *Margaret Cavendish’s Poems and Fancies: A Digital Critical Edition*, ed. Liza Blake, May 2019, <http://library2.utm.utoronto.ca/poemsandfancies/introduction-to-cavendishs-poems-and-fancies/>. Blake’s forthcoming *Choose Your Own Poems and Fancies*, a multimodal monograph from Electric Press, promises to address the relationship between Cavendish’s revisions to the 1653 edition of *Poems, and Fancies*—especially the re-ordering of poems—and her materialism.

⁴²² In *The Blazing World*’s prefatory epistle, “To the Reader,” Cavendish theorizes fancy as “recreat[ing] the mind, and withdraw[ing] it from its more serious contemplations”; *The Blazing World*’s ultimate goal is to “divert my studious thoughts, which I employed in the contemplation thereof, and to delight the reader with variety.” Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World*, in *The Blazing World and Other Writings*, ed. Kate Lilley (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 124. Hereafter *BW*.

This letter “To the Reader” is only included in editions printed with *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*. *Blazing World* was printed solo in 1666 and 1668. These editions include a much shorter epistle to “all Noble and Worthy Ladies” that does not include this explanation of fancy’s motions.

these motions more appropriately characterize fancy's role in her episteme than "imitation" does. Finally, focusing on the first and one of her last pieces of fancy, *Poems, and Fancies* and *The Blazing World*, I show how her fancies illustrate infinite motion through recreation, diversion, and withdrawal in their themes, plots, and even construction. Recreating, diverting, and withdrawing, Cavendish's fancies innovate poesy's practices and purposes.

Cavendish and Lucretian Atomism

Without the British Civil War, Margaret Cavendish may never have become an innovative and prolific philosopher. A Royalist and Lady-in-waiting to the exiled Queen Henrietta Maria, in 1645 Margaret met and married fellow-exile William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, in Paris. An aristocrat with an impressive breadth of interests and talents—from music to interior decoration to science—William, and his brother Charles, had maintained an educational salon, called the "Cavendish" or "Newcastle circle," since the 1630s. The "Cavendish circle" was reportedly "at the forefront of the new philosophy in England, promoting theoretical research and practical experiments on optics, mathematics and mechanics" and boasted Thomas Hobbes among its members.⁴²³ In exile, the Cavendishes continued their salons with Margaret as an often-silent, though engaged, observer. She dined with Hobbes and René Descartes, and her *Philosophical Letters* discloses deep engagement (and conflict) with their theories of mind and body,

⁴²³ Timothy Raylor, "Newcastle's Ghosts: Robert Payne, Ben Jonson, and the 'Cavendish Circle,'" in *Literary Circles and Cultural Communities in Renaissance England*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 92-114, esp. 94.

God, morality, laws of nature, and motion—as well as Henry More’s and Jan Baptist van Helmont’s writings on the same and more topics.⁴²⁴

It is difficult to say who had the most impact on Margaret’s thinking, but her early and tenacious commitment to the self-motion of matter suggests the strong influence of Lucretius and those who upheld his atomist philosophy.⁴²⁵ Supposedly unable to read Latin, the language in which Lucretius wrote his *De rerum natura*, Cavendish could have encountered the text and its principles by way of partial translations, interpretations, and adaptations by several men, including Hobbes. Dedicating her *Poems, and Fancies*—the first part of which is an idiosyncratic but unmistakably Lucretian-inspired philosophy of nature—to her much-beloved brother-in-law Charles, Margaret appears to owe some of her understanding of Lucretian atomism to him. Additionally, she likely received sufficient tutorial from Lucretian acolytes Walter Charleton and Pierre Gassendi, both members of the Cavendish circle. Though her inability to speak French kept her from communicating directly with Gassendi, Charles corresponded with him frequently. With

⁴²⁴ Studies that focus on Cavendish’s tangling with specific contemporaries include, Jacqueline Broad, “Margaret Cavendish,” in *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 35–64; Stephen Clucas, “Margaret Cavendish’s Materialist Critique of Van Helmontian Chymistry,” *Ambix: Journal of the Society for the History of Alchemy and Chemistry* 58, no. 1 (2011): 1–12, [10.1179/174582311X12947034675596](https://doi.org/10.1179/174582311X12947034675596); and Sarah Hutton, “Margaret Cavendish and Henry More,” in *A Princely Brave Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle*, ed. Stephen Clucas (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 185–198.

⁴²⁵ Excellent studies of seventeenth-century atomism and its influence on the Cavendish Circle include Antonio Clericuzio, *Elements, Principles and Corpuscle: A Study of Atomism and Chemistry in the Seventeenth Century* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000); W.F. Kroll, *The Material Word: Literate Culture in the Restoration and Early Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), esp. 85–139, 156–60; Robert Hugh Kargon, *Atomism in England from Hariot to Newton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966); Stephen Clucas, “The Atomism of the Cavendish Circle: A Reappraisal,” *The Seventeenth Century* 9, no. 2 (1994): 247–73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0268117X.1994.10555384>; Jean Jacquot, “Sir Charles Cavendish and His Learned Friends,” *Annals of Science* 8, no. 1 (1952): 13–27; and Boyle, *The Well-Ordered Universe*, 42–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00033795200200122>.

For more on Cavendish’s influencers, in addition to Sarasohn, *The Natural Philosophy*, see also Susan James, “The Philosophical Innovations of Margaret Cavendish,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 7, no. 2 (1999): 219–244, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09608789908571026>.

Charleton, however, she had a personal relationship: she consulted him in his capacity as a physician in the early 1650s, but he also wrote to her in 1667 imploring her to fall in line with the examples set by that most inimical group of experimentalists, the Royal Society.⁴²⁶ Suspicious of philosophy or discovery of nature that relied on man's faulty sense perception, Cavendish vociferously opposed the practice around which the Society organized and could not be swayed.

While seventeenth-century atomism tended to lean toward mechanism, a philosophy that viewed matter as inert and requiring an external force to move it, Lucretius and adherents to his theory posited that atoms, the smallest element of the universe, "fly about continually unimpaired forever"—moving sometimes unpredictably but governed by a kind of self-will.⁴²⁷ Lucretius called this movement *clinamen*. Charleton explained this movement as an "inherent Motive Faculty," while Gassendi was slightly more theistic. He insisted that while atoms were "mobile and active," they derive their motion "from the power of moving and acting which God instilled in them at their very creation, and which functions with his assent."⁴²⁸ Modern translators have dubbed this motion "the swerve."⁴²⁹ While Cavendish eventually denounced the idea of the atom because the atom's discreteness clashed with her monism, she remained

⁴²⁶ Charleton praised them as "from whom we may reasonably at least expect better grounds for general Doctrines, than any the World yet hath been acquainted with." *A Collection of Letters and Poems: Written by several persons of honour and learning, upon divers important subjects, to the late Duke and Dutchess of Newcastle* (London, 1668), 124–5.

⁴²⁷ Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, trans. W.H.D Rouse and Martin Ferguson Smith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 1.951 and 1.1008. Lucretius focuses on atomic motion at 2.62–332. Hereafter *DRN*.

⁴²⁸ Walter Charleton, *Physiologia Epicuro-Gassendo-Charltoniana, or, A fabrick of science natural, upon the hypothesis of atoms founded by Epicurus repaired* (London, 1654), 104. Pierre Gassendi, "Syntagma Philosophicum," in *The Selected Worlds of Pierre Gassendi*, trans. Craig Brush (New York: Johnson Reprint, 1972), 399.

⁴²⁹ Lucretius, *DRN*, 2.216–224 and 2.292–3: "id facit exiguum clinamen principiorum / nec regione loci certa nec tempore certo." ["...is the minute swerving of the first-beginnings at no fixed place and at no fixed time"].

centrally committed to the variability signified and enabled by the swerve for the remainder of her career.

Cavendish also followed Lucretius in associating language, poetry, and atomistic motion. Lucretius built his theory of natural motion on the principle that the movement of atoms, recombining to make up nature's various entities, is no different from the movement of letters, recombining to make up different words.⁴³⁰ Lucretius posited that materially—that is, in their movement and in their composition by atoms—words and atoms are the same.⁴³¹ Directly addressing his choice to write his treatise of natural philosophy in poetry, Lucretius writes that poetry aids the clarity of his ideas and is an inviting and easy medium which mollifies the harshness of his subject.⁴³² While Cavendish and Lucretius might not share the same reason for casting natural philosophy in poetry, they meet again at the kind of movement atoms and letters, the building-blocks of poetry, portray. Lucretius explicitly and repeatedly analogizes atoms (*primordia*) and letters (*elementa*). First, simply, he writes, “so that you may more readily believe many bodies to be common to many things, as we see letters [*elementa*] to be common to words.”⁴³³ Then he elaborates:

Moreover, all through these very lines of mine you see many elements [*elementa*] common to many words, although you must confess that lines and words differ one from another both in meaning and in the sound of their soundings. So much can elements [*elementa*] do, when nothing is changed but order; but the elements

⁴³⁰ Lucretius, *DRN* 2.688-98: “Moreover, throughout my own verses you see many elements common to many words, although you must confess that both verse and words are different and consist of different elements; I do not say that there are very few common letters running through all, or that no two words, if compared, are made up of elements all the same, but that commonly they are not all like all. So in other things also, although many first-beginnings are common to many things, yet taken one with another they can make up a whole quite unlike.”

⁴³¹ See Jonathan Goldberg, “Margaret Cavendish and Lucy Hutchinson: Writing Matter,” in *The Seeds of Things: Theorizing Sexuality and Materiality in the Renaissance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 125.

⁴³² Lucretius, *DRN*, 1.142-5; 1.942-50.

⁴³³ Lucretius, *DRN*, 1.196-9.

[*primordia*] that are the beginnings of things can bring with them more kinds of variety, from which all the various things can be produced.⁴³⁴

In this analogy, Lucretius describes both letters and elemental first-beginnings as not just tending toward variety-producing recombination but in fact *required* to recombine.

Knowledge cannot be articulated or transmitted if letters don't rearrange to form new words; likewise, elements recombine in order to realize nature's fecundity.

This passage's underlying premise, that letters and the elements of nature tend toward variety-producing recombination, clearly influences the kind of poetic style to which Cavendish aspires. In *Poems, and Fancies*, she pleads:

Give Mee the Free, and Noble Stile,
Which seems uncurb'd, though it be wild:
Though It runs wild about, It cares not where;
It shewes more Courage, then It doth of Feare.
Give me a Stile that Nature frames, not Art:
For Art doth seem to take the Pedants part.⁴³⁵

The passage's most obvious debt to Lucretius is Cavendish's plea for a "Free, and Noble Stile...that Nature frames." Just as Lucretius analogizes the movement of letters and atoms, Cavendish acknowledges that only a freely-moving and variable rhetorical style would be consistent with nature. Other Lucretian principles are present as well. First, she acknowledges the overarching reason why Lucretius writes his poem in the first place: to, in the Epicurean tradition, free humans from fear, make them self-sufficient, and to enable them to attain *ataraxia*, tranquility of mind.⁴³⁶ Second, her hedging that her style should "see[m] uncurb'd" is consistent with the conditions Lucretius puts on the swerve. Despite language, like "unimpaired," suggesting total elemental freedom, Lucretius

⁴³⁴ Lucretius, *DRN*, 1.823-9. See also 2.688-98 quoted above.

⁴³⁵ Cavendish, *P&F*, 110, lines 1-6.

⁴³⁶ Lucretius, *DRN*, xxix.

identifies an inherent controlling mind or will that directs atomic motion.⁴³⁷ The presence of a self-will appeals to Cavendish who, above all, opposes the lifelessness of mechanism. Even after Cavendish forsakes the idea of the atom, she maintains a belief that matter is self-motion. Thus, matter's movements may be wild, but they are not completely unmonitored or undirected; a kind of inherent will or soul directs matter's freedom.

However, we should not confuse direction with teleology—that is, we should not take the presence of a directing will or mind as proof that motion is directed *toward* a particular terminus for Cavendish or Lucretius. Both express this fine distinction in ways that have triggered charges of atheism from those who did not properly recognize that Lucretius and Cavendish quarantine nature and its motions from topics relating to divinity.⁴³⁸ They do so not to deny the supremacy of God but rather to show humility toward God's power and plan. Cavendish and Lucretius pursue knowledge of what they think they can know, but both adopt a skeptical attitude, essentially admitting that their human-made theories of nature cannot apprehend divine decree. Further, this is not the purpose of their work. For his part, Lucretius writes,

For although I might not know what first-beginnings of things are, this nevertheless I would make bold to maintain from the ways of heaven itself, and to

⁴³⁷ Lucretius, *DRN*, 2.251-62 and 2.284-93.

⁴³⁸ The clerk Jon Stansby, an acquaintance of founding members of the Royal Society, a group Cavendish famously and constantly lambasted for their practices of experimental philosophy, penned impugning verses that called Cavendish, "The great atheistical philosophraster." (John Stansby, quoted in Douglas Grant, *Margaret the First: A Biography of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, 1623-1673* [London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957], 199). Cavendish may have been aware of these accusations, or wanted to preempt them, when she dedicated an entire epistle to her readers of *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655) to clarifying that she was not an atheist—and even evangelizing. Asking for her readers to give her the same "privilege" as other natural philosophers—to discuss natural philosophy without being termed an atheist—she asks, "pray account me not an Atheist, but beleieve as I do in God Almighty" (n.p.). See also Sarasohn, *The Natural Philosophy*, 85-6.

On Lucretius' atheism, see also John Evelyn, *An Essay on the First Book of T. Lucretius Carus De Rerum Natura* (London, 1656), 111, where he calls Lucretius a "wary Atheist"; Kargon, *Atomism in England*, 27.

demonstrate from many another source, that the nature of the universe has by no means been made for us through divine power.⁴³⁹

Lucretius separates his search for the nature of first-beginnings, a search which he admits he has still not completed, from understanding the ways of heaven. He implies that even if he were to understand the nature of first-beginnings, it would not give him any more knowledge of the divine. Throughout her career, Cavendish handles the distinction between God and Nature in much the same way, figuring Nature as something made by God “to act freely” and “in a way and manner proper to his Omnipotency and Incomprehensible by us.”⁴⁴⁰ Cavendish never denies that God exists or holds power over Nature, but she does distinguish between God’s and Nature’s operations, endeavoring only to clarify the latter.

Situating Cavendish’s approach to language and matter, language-as-matter, within the materialist traditions that influenced and surrounded her is a crucial step in deciphering Cavendish’s theory of *poiesis*. This is partly because, as we will see shortly, Cavendish’s theory of poesy is startling idiosyncratic, and, at times, it appears to squarely contradict the theories that preceded it. In the moments when her idiosyncrasy makes her theory nearly impenetrable, it helps to remember her principles of matter since we know that she intends to follow a Lucretian-inspired philosophy where letter and language act exactly like the self-motive, variety-tending matter that composes the universe. Since, for Cavendish, matter is motion—infinite motion, in fact—then language, must somehow represent this infinite motion. Linguistic variety is one of the ways Cavendish honors and embodies infinite motion in her language. In the first place, she has her various ways of

⁴³⁹ Lucretius, *DRN*, 2.177-181.

⁴⁴⁰ Cavendish, *PL*, 165, 114, 525-6.

referring to matter—from “infinite corporeal substance”⁴⁴¹ to “self-moving Matter”⁴⁴² to “infinite self-moving body” to “corporeal figurative (self-)motion” to “rational corporeal motions.”⁴⁴³ But we should also acknowledge the double entendre in the practices she harnesses to make fancy—recreation diversion, and withdrawal as both social manners and specific descriptions of matter’s movement. And finally, these practices themselves sustain variety—recreating things and producing new things from matter’s unexpected diversions and withdrawals. Therefore, as we decipher Cavendish’s theory of poesy, one of the most exciting and innovative things we carry forward is the variety produced from infinite self-motion. However, how does poesy operate in a system with these principles?

Fancy’s Motions

Perhaps the most innovative aspect of Cavendish’s fancy is that she jettisons imitation from her theory of poesy. Cavendish does not fall in line with any of her contemporaries—Sidney, who theorizes poesy as “an art of imitation,” William Davenant, who calls poesy “the best Expositor of Nature,” or Hobbes, who claims that poesy should “imitat[e] humane life.”⁴⁴⁴ For Cavendish, fancy is not subordinated to nature; it does not explicate or copy it. In fact, she divorces imitation and fancy early in her career when she praises “the inventor”—“a kinde of a creatour”; “He...that invents something new”—and patronizes the imitator, he who “adds nothing to the substance or

⁴⁴¹ Cavendish, *PL*, 10.

⁴⁴² Margaret Cavendish, “An Argumental Discourse,” in *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (London, 1666), h1r. Citations from this edition unless otherwise noted; hereafter *OEP*.

⁴⁴³ Cavendish, *BW*, 154, 153, 189.

⁴⁴⁴ Sidney, *Defence*, 8-9; William Davenant, “The Author’s Preface to his much honoured friend Mr. Hobbs,” in *A Discourse upon Gondibert*, 116; and Hobbes, “The Answer of Mr. Hobbs to Sr. William D’Avenant’s Preface before Gondibert,” in *A Discourse upon Gondibert*, 130.

invention, only strives to resemble it.”⁴⁴⁵ After marginalizing both imitation and resemblance as inferior practices to invention and creation, it will only take a year for Cavendish to explicate which human practice invents and creates without imitation or resemblance: fancy. This she explains in the fourth of six epistles to *Natures Pictures*’ readers: “descriptions are to imitate and fancy to create; for fancy is not an imitation of nature, but a natural Creation, which I take to be the true Poetry.”⁴⁴⁶ Here she unmistakably separates imitation—patterning or reflecting nature—and creation of new natural things, making poesy responsible for only the latter. She re-frames and reinforces this separation in the epistle to the readers of *The Blazing World* when she contrasts natural philosophy, the study of nature, and fancy. Natural philosophy is “a rational search and enquiry into the causes of natural effects,” but fancy is “a voluntary creation or production of the mind.”⁴⁴⁷ While she frames both as motions, natural philosophy searches, hoping to elucidate and reflect nature’s ways. Fancy, however, exercises self-motion and produces variety, just as nature does.⁴⁴⁸

As if anticipating skepticism of her ground-breaking conception of fancy, Cavendish painstakingly builds her theory of poesy from the foundation up. That is, early in her career, she characterizes fancy in the familiar terms used in the ancient and first discussions of representation. Her earliest definition of fancy considers it in terms of giving shape, or figuration—the parent category developed by the ancient philosophers

⁴⁴⁵ Margaret Cavendish, *The Worlds Olio* (London, 1655), 26.

⁴⁴⁶ Cavendish, “To the Reader,” in *NP*, n.p. (4th letter).

⁴⁴⁷ Cavendish, *BW*, 123-4.

⁴⁴⁸ “[T]here is so much variety in Nature, proceeding from self-motion of Matter, as not possible to be numbred, nor thorowly known by any Creature” (Cavendish, *PL*, 200); “[B]y reason Nature is a perpetual motion, she must of necessity cause infinite Varieties” (Cavendish, *GNP*, 6).

for any kind of representation, whether oral, written, or visual.⁴⁴⁹ In *Philosophicall Fancies* (1653) she explains that fancy, memory, remembrance, and understanding are all mental operations carried out by rational spirits that—in a helpful metaphor invoking the motivity of those mental operations—dance into different shapes. But, of the four, only fancy is self-motive.

What Object soever is presented unto [the rational spirits] by the senses, they strait dance themselves into that Figure; this is Memory. And when they dance the same figure without the helpe of the outward object, this is Remembrance. When they dance figures of their owne invention, (as I may say) then that is Imagination or Fancie. Understanding is when they dance perfectly (as I may say) not to misse the least part of those Figures that are brought through the senses. Will is to choose a dance, that is to move as they please, and not as they are perswaded by the sensitive spirits.⁴⁵⁰

When memory, remembrance, or understanding occur, the rational spirits dance into shapes under an influence: memory is when the rational spirits dance into the shape of an object presented to the senses; remembrance is when the rational spirits figure an object once encountered but currently absent; understanding is when the rational spirits figure an object perfectly. Fancy occurs when the rational spirits are self-motive: when they invent a new figure, when they dance into a shape “of their owne invention.”

Over the rest of her career, Cavendish drives a wedge between what appears in *Philosophicall Fancies* as two types of figuring—one that occurs involuntarily, imitation, and one that occurs voluntarily, fancy. By the time she releases the second edition of *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655, rev. 1663), she calls the figuring that results in memory, remembrance, and understanding, “printing” or “picturing out.”⁴⁵¹ Over the

⁴⁴⁹ See Judith H. Anderson and Joan Pong Linton, “Introduction,” in *Go Figure: Energies, Forms, and Institutions in the Early Modern World*, ed. Judith H. Anderson and Joan Pong Linton (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 4, and Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, IX.i.10-11.

⁴⁵⁰ Margaret Cavendish, *Philosophicall Fancies* (London, 1653), 31. Hereafter *PF*.

⁴⁵¹ Cavendish, *PPO*, 64 and 66.

next few years, she transitions to describing this kind of figuring—reproducing an exterior object from impression or perception—“patterning” and “imitation.”⁴⁵² Imitation is an involuntary motion occasioned by “exterior perceptions” of “foreign parts.”⁴⁵³ Fancy’s figuration is a voluntary motion that is not influenced by the perception or impression of an exterior object: “Fancy goeth not so much by Rule, & Method, as by Choice.”⁴⁵⁴

Recently, one scholar has suggested that among the things Cavendish chooses for her fancy is disorder.⁴⁵⁵ That is, allowing self-motion to drive her creative process—to produce new and various things—she embraces a process of production that favors chaos and undirected disruption. Disorder is not, as some recent philosophers have mistaken it, an unproductive quality that interrupts natural operations. Indeed, any disappointment at seeing disorder in Cavendish’s work discloses misguided thinking that disorder is a quality, instead of, truly, a process or motion.

In a remarkably lucid attempt to explicate Cavendish’s philosophy, Deborah Boyle summarizes two such camps that have mischaracterized disorder as a quality rather than as a variety-producing process. On one side are those who subscribe to the “True Disorders” mindset. Described by Karen Detlefsen, the “True Disorders” view draws on Cavendish’s claims that “self-moving Matter may sometimes erre and move irregularly”—that is, move in ways that are not “after the ordinary, common or usual way

⁴⁵² To pattern is “nothing else but to imitate, and to make a figure in its own substance or parts of Matter like another figure” (Cavendish, *PL*, 420).

⁴⁵³ Cavendish, “To the Reader,” in *OEP*, g2r. On perception and patterning, see also Kourken Michaelian, “Margaret Cavendish’s Epistemology,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 17, no. 1 (2009): 31–53, esp. 38–45, 10.1080/09608780802548259; Cavendish, *PL*, 22–25; and Thell, “[A]s lightly as two thoughts’,” 15.

⁴⁵⁴ Cavendish, “To All Noble, and Worthy Ladies,” *P&F*, A3r.

⁴⁵⁵ Hock, “Fanciful Poetics,” 802.

or manner.”⁴⁵⁶ Thus, Detlefsen concludes that disorder occurs when matter “act[s] in ways that are perversions from nature’s norms.”⁴⁵⁷ And Boyle adds that, “According to the True Disorders view, then, when an entity moves in the way that is ‘proper and natural,’ those motions are orderly and regular; when it moves differently than it is supposed to, the motions are disorderly and irregular.”⁴⁵⁸ But how is an entity directed only by self-motion “supposed to” move? Doesn’t the declaration of normative behavior run afoul of the freedom of self-motion? The “True Disorders” hypothesis fails because it is incompatible with the self-moving, infinitely various nature Cavendish theorizes. Either nature is restricted to moving only in common or usual ways or it is infinitely various.

Opposed to the “True Disorders” philosophers are the “No True Disorders” philosophers, such as David Cuning and Lisa Walters, who discard the supposition of norms. Cuning and Walters focus on the passages where irregularities are still part of nature and “only appear disorderly” because we cannot comprehend nature’s full scheme.⁴⁵⁹ Passages that support the “No True Disorders” view are ones that deny that irregularities even exist, such as in *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (1666)—“what we call Irregularities in Nature, are really nothing but a variety of Natures motions”⁴⁶⁰—and in *Philosophical Letters*—“as for Irregularities, properly there is none in Nature, for Nature is Regular; but that, which Man (who is but a small part of Nature, and therefore but partly knowing) names Irregularities, or Imperfections, is onely a

⁴⁵⁶ Cavendish, *PL*, 152, 359-60. See also “An Argumental Discourse,” in *OEP* where Cavendish’s “former” thoughts call Irregularities “extravagant and refractory” movements (n1r).

⁴⁵⁷ Detlefsen, “Reason and Freedom,” 177.

⁴⁵⁸ Boyle, *The Well-Ordered Universe*, 23-4.

⁴⁵⁹ Boyle, *The Well-Ordered Universe*, 85.

⁴⁶⁰ Cavendish, *OEP*, 44.

change and alteration of motions.”⁴⁶¹ The “No True Disorders” philosophers argue that what humans see as irregularity or imperfection is the fundamental and natural “change and alteration of motions.” They are right: change and alteration are the primary building blocks of Cavendish’s self-moving nature, and whatever we see as irregular is the fault of our limited episteme. But that does not mean we should discard “disorder” from our vocabulary; it means that we need to refine our conception of disorder as Cavendish tells us we must: from a quality to a kind of motion.

This motion, Jessie Hock avers, “looks like” fancy. A scholar who would likely sympathize with the *ethos* of the “No True Disorders” position (though not its name), Hock argues that disorder “is [not] a falling off from the state of order: the originary state—of nature, of the mind—is variety, fancy (which looks like disorder).”⁴⁶² Along with Hock, I think we should recuperate “disorder” as a kind of motion that produces variety, especially the kind of variety for which fancy is responsible. But I think Cavendish also gifts us a way to relieve the headache that comes from having to constantly remind ourselves that disorder is a motion, not a pejorative quality. That gift is the specification of fancy’s motions as recreation, diversion, and withdrawal. All three of these evoke movement away from something; they are the opposite of imitation, which seeks to create copies and make likenesses. Recreation, diversion, and withdrawal seek difference by breaking or disrupting a previous order, pattern, or plan.

Cavendish does not explicitly explain that these are the motions of her fancies until *The Blazing World*. However, throughout her career as a fancy-writer, she not only uses these terms to characterize vitalist movement, but she also uses them at vitalist

⁴⁶¹ Cavendish, *PL*, 439.

⁴⁶² Hock, “Fanciful Poetics,” 802.

moments in her fancies. These are moments when she fancifies her philosophy—when something happens in the course of the text that illustrates or narrativizes her vitalist motion in a fanciful context.

Especially at times like these, Cavendish often relishes in double entendre. For example, from her earliest text, she exploits the double entendre of “recreate,” as to enjoy leisure and idle time—the time most appropriate for fancy⁴⁶³—and to create anew.⁴⁶⁴ This exploitation, as she’ll exploit diversion and withdrawal as well, emphasizes her commitment to variety: she switches between meanings, or she leaves the reader guessing whether she invokes the sense of the word as a social manner or as the natural process. For example, in “An Epistle to Mistris Toppe,” a prefatory letter to *Poems, and Fancies*, a reference to her neighbors’ “*lawfull Recreations*” likely means how they spend their leisure time.⁴⁶⁵ Later in the volume, however, “recreation” appears in “A Dialogue betwixt Wit, and Beauty” when Wit describes its movements in unmistakably vitalist terms:

For Wit is fresh, and new, doth sport, and play,
And runs about the Humour every way.
...
Wit ingenious, doth new Inventions find,
To ease the Body, recreate the Mind.⁴⁶⁶

This excerpt clearly exercises the double entendre. The first part of the quotation describes wit running about, playing, and inventing new things, yet the last line insinuates it can also relax the mind, something that might happen during leisure time. Thus we can read “recreate the Mind” as conveying both meanings—enjoying the same relaxation as

⁴⁶³ See Cavendish, “To Naturall Philosophers,” in *P&F*, n.p.

⁴⁶⁴ See Hanlon, “Margaret Cavendish’s Anthropocene Worlds,” 63.

⁴⁶⁵ Cavendish, “An Epistle to Mistris Toppe,” in *P&F*, A5r.

⁴⁶⁶ Cavendish, “A Dialogue betwixt Wit, and Beauty,” in *P&F*, 81.

the body, and running, inventing, and playing. Just two poems later, another dialogue between Learning and Ignorance emphasizes this second, active meaning when Learning describes itself as

seek[ing] about, new things to find;
In that Pursuit, doth recreate the Mind.⁴⁶⁷

Again, she associates newness and recreation, suggesting the meaning of change rather than leisure.

References to recreation as a generative, vitalist process recur in almost every subsequent fanciful text. In *Natures Pictures*, a dialogue between wise, witty, and learned ladies restages *Poems, and Fancies*' dialogue between learning and ignorance, with the witty lady insisting that "Wit invents profitable Arts, it creates Sciences, it delights the Minde, it recreates the Life, and entertains Time."⁴⁶⁸ Sitting alongside "delights" and "entertains," "recreates" could certainly be taken as leisure. But these—and "creates"—are also verbs that convey exercise, suggesting the active and regenerative meaning of "recreates": wit enables progress and growth in life. The composition of *Natures Pictures* in fact encourages its readers to often take the regenerative meaning of "recreation." Its title page describes the volume as

several feigned Stories of Natural Descriptions, as Comical, Tragical, and Tragi-Comical, Poetical, Romancical, Philosophical, and Historical, both in Prose and verse, some all Verse, some all Prose, some mixt, partly Prose, and partly Verse. Also, there are some Morals, and some Dialogues; but they are as the Advantage Loaves of Bread to a Bakers dozen; and a true Story at the latter end, wherein there is no Feignings.⁴⁶⁹

The dizzying heterogeneity of this volume requires an attentive and nimble reader to

⁴⁶⁷ Cavendish, "A Dialogue betwixt Learning, and Ignorance," in *P&F*, 84.

⁴⁶⁸ Cavendish, "The Dialogue of the Wise Lady, the Learned Lady, and the Witty Lady," in *NP*, 179.

⁴⁶⁹ Cavendish, *NP*, t.p.

constantly reset her expectations and ways of reading as the volume shifts between different genres and styles. One of those styles is familiar from Cavendish's *Poems, and Fancies*, the theorizing of poetry. In *The She-Anchoret*, a prose narrative that *The Blazing World* in many ways recreates, a group of poets visits a learned and inquisitive orphan girl who explains that poetry is recreative. In addition to moving the passions, correcting errors, condemning follies, encouraging noble endeavors, pleasing the senses, delighting the mind, increasing knowledge, and penciling nature, poetry, she says, "recreates thoughts."⁴⁷⁰ Again, as in the earlier dialogue between wise, witty, and learned ladies, "recreates" could carry both meanings. Just one item in a long list of poetry's effects, it is impossible to say whether Cavendish means one meaning or the other—whether poetry provides relief from serious contemplation, or whether the genre itself renovates ideas.

Cavendish's poems do not just assert vitalist motion, but they also illustrate it. Take, for example, "The Pastime, and Recreation of the Queen of Fairies in Fairy-land, the Center of the Earth," which describes a day in the leisurely life of Queen Mab and her attendant fairies. A busy though enjoyable day of dancing, snoozing, supping, and hunting draws to a close with the cock calling Queen Mab home and the soft light of meteors and glowworms providing a soothing ambience. But then the final four verses shift abruptly in tone and subject, disrupting the poem's easy entertainment and unsettling the close of the poem—not least of all because Queen Mab takes flight perhaps in search of nighttime ribaldry:

But women, that inconstant are by kind,
Can never in one place content their mind.
For she her Charriot calcs, and will away,

⁴⁷⁰ Cavendish, *The She-Anchoret*, in *NP*, 349.

To upper Earth, impatient is of stay.⁴⁷¹

An otherwise alluring day-in-the-life, in its final moments the poem suddenly and derogatorily associates Queen Mab with women in a totalizing and off-topic indictment that seems only intended to unnecessarily critique women as “inconstant...by kind.”⁴⁷² The harshness of the penultimate couplet also awakens the reader in preparation for a much subtler connection to Cavendish’s philosophy made in the final image of impatience and anticipated flight. If we read the two couplets together, Cavendish’s condemnation of women for being inconstant and easily distracted is a fitting preface for a fantastical manifestation of her vitalist philosophy: Queen Mab flitting away to find new entertainment is an image with inconstancy and variety at its core.

Illustrations—not just statements—of recreation, diversion, and withdrawal often co-occur throughout her fanciful corpus. For example, “A Description of diverted grief” from *Natures Pictures* tells the story of a man whose young and fair wife dies. For “a week or two” he mourns her, unable to go outside; after “a month or two” he begins to seek “Recreations,” which “divert” his thoughts to such an extent that he can walk by his deceased wife’s grave but not drop a tear. He soon marries a young and witty woman, but within six months their relationship sours and he begins to regret this marriage, thinking of his “dear dead Wife that was so wondrous kinde.” Eventually, his new wife leaves him for another man.⁴⁷³ The man’s love for his wife is re-created as love for another woman,

⁴⁷¹ Cavendish, “The *Pastime*, and *Recreation* of the *Queen of Fairies* in *Fairy-land*, the *Center* of the *Earth*,” in *P&F*, Ccr.

⁴⁷² On Cavendish’s criticism of her own sex, see Sarasohn, *The Natural Philosophy*, 159-161. Sarasohn interprets a moment in *Observations* where Cavendish avers that women would make better natural philosophers than men, because women spend their idle time making artificial things like sweetmeats and pies, as an insult (102). The evidence for the insult is in the use of the always-derogatory word “artificial.” See also examples of Cavendish’s self-deprecation, which she ties to her gender: “To Naturall Philosophers,” in *P&F*, n.p.; and “Epistle to the Reader,” in *PPO*, b1v.

⁴⁷³ Cavendish, “A Description of diverted grief,” in *NP*, 4-6.

while the turning over of his feelings leads him away from, physically diverts him from, his wife's grave. In this poem, the man's new love, his neglect of his deceased wife's grave, and his eventual forgetting of his grief and devotion to his former wife are illustrations and consequences of diversion and recreation—diversion and recreation that appear in the poem as both relieving entertainment and the acts of retiring former habits and feelings and developing new ones.

Beyond the narrative of a single poem, Cavendish invests an entire volume with illustrating and effecting a diversion. In a prefatory letter to *Poems, and Fancies*' readers, she admits that she wrote the volume to divert her thoughts away from her woes: "For my Rest being broke with discontented Thoughts, because I was from my Lord, and Husband, knowing him to be in great Wants, and my selfe in the same Condition; to divert them, I strove to turne the Stream."⁴⁷⁴ The work as a whole, she insinuates, should be read as Cavendish turning the stream of her thoughts constantly away from thinking of her and her husband's condition.

Yet, like recreation, diversion is not always a tactic for forgetting or avoiding problems; Cavendish classifies it as a healthy and life-preserving habit for young women. In *Sociable Letters* (1664), for example, she writes that when a lady is overcome with splenetic emotions, she should seek "Company and Jollity, to divert Melancholy, and to remove the Splenetick Obstructions and Crude Vapours, for which Dancing, Feasting, Gaming, and the like, is the best Cure, *Probatum est*."⁴⁷⁵ Partaking of diverse company and social activities exercises ladies' attention and removes melancholy. Likewise, in a letter to her sister Ann, Cavendish prescribes that, instead of shackling herself to a

⁴⁷⁴ Cavendish, "To the Reader," in *P&F*, n.p.

⁴⁷⁵ Cavendish, XXXIV, in *Sociable Letters* (London, 1664), 71. Hereafter *SL*.

deceiving man who turns out to be dishonorable husband, her sister should rather “seek Diversion by much Company.” As in the previous letter, a lady dispersing her attention and cultivating variety in her life is a great personal boon. Cavendish ultimately endorses that “the Safest Way is to Live a Single Life.”⁴⁷⁶ If a lady cannot find a suitable and honorable partner, she should rather avoid marriage and follow any self-inclination. Resonances of matter’s self-motion ring in this endorsement of the self-directed single life such that we can hear both meanings of diversion, as a social manner and as a movement away.

An occurrence of “withdraw” in *The She-Anchoret*—a text that, like *The Blazing World*, combines natural philosophy and fiction—reverses this balance, explicitly invoking nature’s operations as an explanation for why one should sometimes withdraw from company. Explaining the hierarchy of mind over body, rational spirits over sensitive ones, the wise young lady of *The She-Anchoret* illustrates how the mind and rational spirits regulate the sensitive spirits and body for the ease of the whole person:

Doth not our Mind (which is the Rational part) perswade the Body (which is the Sensitive part, and that wherein works the Sensitive Matter or Spirits) to lye, to rest, or to withdraw from outward Employments, because it would not be disturbed with the labour of the Sensitive spirits?⁴⁷⁷

Couched in a highly philosophical explanation, here “withdraw” rings with both the movement Cavendish sees in nature as well as the social behavior. She uses the natural motion she theorizes to recommend this healthy and natural social behavior.

Cavendish underscores “withdraw” as a natural motion in an unusual use of it in one of her natural philosophies. She rarely uses “withdraw” in her natural philosophies,

⁴⁷⁶ Cavendish, CCI, in *SL*, 427.

⁴⁷⁷ Cavendish, *The She-Anchoret*, in *NP*, 307-8.

opting instead for the language of “sympathy” and “antipathy.”⁴⁷⁸ But, in a letter from *Philosophical Letters* criticizing Henry More’s position that matter is passive and cannot move itself, she argues decisively in favor of her principle of self-motion using both “withdraw” and “antipathy”: “for we may plainly see in all effects of Nature, that there is Sympathy and Antipathy, and what is this else, but approaching to things agreeable and pleasant, and withdrawing it self from things disagreeable, and hurtful or offensive?”⁴⁷⁹ The use of the cognates “withdraw” and “antipathy” together suggests that fancy and nature are, in fact, varieties of one another. Likewise, we see Cavendish’s penchant for co-mingling natural philosophy and fancy. In this vein, the next sections consider how two fanciful texts illustrate recreation, diversion, and withdrawal often by way of engaging her natural philosophy. I unpack precisely how fanciful recreation, diversion, and withdrawal create and uphold infinite motion and variety as principles of her fancy.

Recreating Variety in *Poems, and Fancies*

Cavendish illustrates recreation, diversion, and withdrawal in both micropoetic features, like language and imagery, and macropoetic or structural attributes. Though I use the more familiar term “structural” to help elucidate the level of scale and the concerns that constitute macropoetic attributes, I don’t want to reduce what I call “macropoetic” attributes simply to “structure.” This preference is motivated partially by the baggage “structure” carries as a literary-critical term and root of a literary-critical

⁴⁷⁸ She also uses this language for “diversion.” See *PF*: when disputes in nature occur, the different degrees of matter “mak[e] faction by Sympathy, and Fraction, by Antipathy” (Cavendish, *PF*, 12). She has a substitute for “recreation” as well: simply “change” or sometimes “creations and dissolutions.” See Cavendish, *PF*, 2; Cavendish, *PPO*, 2.

⁴⁷⁹ Cavendish, *PL*, 155-6.

movement. Structuralism began as a reaction against what critics perceived as an untidiness in literary criticism; it sought to turn the study of literature into an objective pursuit: not just removing subjective value judgement from the analysis of a text's features, but also sorting a text into one of four strictly-defined "narrative categories"—comic, romantic, tragic, and ironic.⁴⁸⁰ Not only do many of Cavendish's fanciful texts, *Poems, and Fancies* and *The Blazing World* included, baldly defy generic and narrative coherence in ways that make it impossible to affix them to narrative categories, but, in both her philosophy and fancy-making, Cavendish refuses the presumption of fixity and stability. Honoring Cavendish's philosophy, I read *Poems, and Fancies* and *The Blazing World* as accumulations of movements in the literal sense of that word: the texts illustrate—both in their content and language and in their composition—movement. A word like "macropoetic"—with its root, "poesy," derived from the Greek *poiein*, "to make"—retains a sense of movement, while "structure" does not.⁴⁸¹ Thus "macropoetic" implies the process—or at the very least the event—of creation, of making. The point is to use a term that expresses an act or motion rather than a term that connotes something static.

Such movement is readily recognizable from the macropoetic features of *Poems, and Fancies*, a text whose sections Cavendish joins with what she calls, "clasps." While the name implies bridging from one section to another, in form and function, Cavendish's clasps are much more vitalist.⁴⁸² They channel and present variety and a motion too

⁴⁸⁰ See Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), esp. 162.

⁴⁸¹ Sidney, *Defence*, 8.

⁴⁸² Liza Blake describes the clasps as links in a chain. While brief, Blake's analysis of how the clasps function in relation to the rest of the text is still more attentive to the clasps than most other analyses. See Blake, "Reading Poems (and Fancies)."

undirected and unorganized to be called “bridging.” Embodying variety, none of the four clasps are identical—in content or form—but there are a few qualities that are almost universal: they tend to be clearly designated at the top of a page, with decorative woodcutting (except for the third one), and a title in roman capital letters (except for the last one). However, it’s not clear how long each clasp lasts—or, if you like, how hefty each clasp is. At the first two clasps, “THE CLAPSE” is followed by an otherwise untitled poem, which is then followed by an italicized title for a seemingly unrelated poem. It’s possible to read the clasp as this single poem, though there are indications that there is more to a clasp. At the first clasp, following the untitled poem are five distinctly-titled poems and a short prose essay on mathematical topics before an essay, “To Morall Philosophers,” that appears to preface a new section of the text comprised of dialogues.⁴⁸³ Cavendish repeats this haphazard collecting at the second clasp: her plea for a “free and noble” style like nature’s precedes two poems about hunting a hare and a stag and two more allegorical poems about the ruin of Britain. Then there is decorative woodcutting that seems to conclude the section before an essay “To Poets” that appears to preface just a single poem meditating on poets as thieves, which itself precedes a new section, “FANCIES.”⁴⁸⁴

Unlike the uncertainly-formed and incoherent first two clasps, at the last two

⁴⁸³ In the revised 1668 edition, the demarcation of the first clasp is not as drastic, and uncertainties still remain about what exactly constitutes the clasp. The clasp occurs in the same place as in the 1653 volume, but it is formally and stylistically indistinguishable from the other poems. She appears to diminish the functionality of the poem, the sense that she uses it to bridge anything. Instead, she re-titles “To Morall Philosophers” as an essay, “Of Moral Philosophy, and Moralists,” and puts it at the beginning of a well-distinguished, “The Second Part,” which begins on the next recto.

⁴⁸⁴ The 1668 version is markedly clearer about what constitutes the clasp. This edition retains the clear demarcation of the clasp after woodcut ornamentation at the head of the page. After the last poem about the ruin of Britain, a new section, “The Third Part,” is clearly initiated on the next recto. It begins with the letter “To Poets.”

clasps, the titles--“THE CLASPE” and “The Claspe,” respectively—are followed by italicized poem titles that appear to start a multi-part series of related poems. Therefore, the clasp designation seems to apply to everything that follows until another clear section break. The third clasp is, like the two preceding it, a more noticeably distinct part of the text, but, like the one it precedes, it is a series of clearly related poems. The initial third clasp poem, “Fantasmes Masque” acts as a prologue to a masque, albeit one that Cavendish might not intend to have performed, as she describes it as “stage[d]” on the “Braine, whereon it is Acted.”⁴⁸⁵ Two essays, one addressed “To all Writing Ladies” and one untitled, follow the masque before the volume resumes with another “POEMS” section. Of the four clasps, this one is the most robust and distinct. The final clasp begins a three-poem series about fairies, who live in man’s brain and affect his feelings, thoughts, and actions, before moving without explicit transition to four poems which theorize the war of animal spirits inside a person’s body and a final poem that “similizes” the body’s parts to many countries. Given differing lengths and definition, it is not clear what actually constitutes a clasp—a single poem or a series of poems—and it is also not clear to what extent the clasp is an autonomous or distinct unit of the text.

Adding to the strangeness, while the designation implies bridging, transitioning, or carrying the reader to a new set of ideas or concerns, there is nothing in any of what appear to be the clasp poems that explicitly images or references bridging together, transition, or unification of parts. Rather, in the initial poems of the first two clasps Cavendish anxiously reflects on writing and writing style in ways that clearly acknowledge her developing theory of atomistic-vitalist motion. In the first poem, she

⁴⁸⁵ Cavendish, *P&F*, 155.

depicts struggling to wrangle her thoughts, which “run out of Breath, then downe would lye...Then up would get, and run another length.”⁴⁸⁶ The second clasp poem is the one cited above for its Lucretian resonances: the plea for a “Free, and Noble Stile,” one that “seems uncurb’d, though it be wild” and that “Nature frames, not Art.”⁴⁸⁷ Neither of these clasps figures the kind of fastening movement we expect from a literal clasp. Although they do explicate, in poem form, the kind of movement Cavendish philosophizes: free, wild, diverting. Instead of bridges, these poems feel more like self-reflective interruptions that give a sense of the constant concern underneath Cavendish’s volume—that fancy recreates nature’s various, vitalist movement.

Indeed, the clasps are not the only part of the volume where Cavendish indicates the integrality of her theories of motion to her composition process and to her conceptions and exercises of fancy in general. She suggests as much in the prefatory matter, where she hints that the volume, and poetry specifically, embody thoughts in chaotic motion. In the dedicatory epistle to her brother-in-law, Charles Cavendish, she describes poetry as “the Spinning of the braine,”⁴⁸⁸ and she frequently alludes to the relief this volume provided by allowing her to exorcise thoughts that “ru[n] about untill they have been in a fiery heat.”⁴⁸⁹ Spinning and running about both evoke tireless, uncontrolled self-movements—movements of her thoughts clearly Cavendish cannot control.

Recognizing that fancy’s atomistic-vitalist movement is actually a motivating idea

⁴⁸⁶ Cavendish, *P&F*, 47.

⁴⁸⁷ Cavendish, *P&F*, 110.

⁴⁸⁸ Cavendish, “The Epistle Dedicatory: To Sir Charles Cavendish, My Noble Brother-in-Law,” in *P&F*, A2r.

⁴⁸⁹ Cavendish, “To Naturall Philosophers,” in *P&F*, n.p.

for the whole volume helps us to see that not just the clasps but the poems that surround them, too, figure and attempt to explain this atomistic-vitalist movement. While the clasps are explicit and personal reflections on the relationship between her poetry and natural philosophy, the first, second, and third sections of the volume—the sections which the first two clasps join—all theorize how things move and operate. The first section starts at the atomic level: it details the movement of atoms; the different kinds of atoms and their sizes and weights; how atoms join together to make different entities—vegetables, minerals, and animals; how atoms move differently when an organic body is alive or dead, young or old; how they attract or repel one another; how they compose the elements; how they move at different times of the day and under different temperatures; and more. It feels as if the poems' primary purpose is to teach: not only does Cavendish annotate and clarify her meaning in the margins next to the poems, but she also writes in plain rather than artful language, recreating in poetic form the linguistic style she employs in her natural philosophies.⁴⁹⁰ Her language is often “close, naked, [and] natural,” rarely including the “specious *Tropes and Figures*” and “trick of *Metaphors*” members of the Royal Society denigrated.⁴⁹¹

When she does employ metaphor and simile, she reserves them for extra clarification. For example, one of the first poems, “A World made by Atomes,” begins with the plainly-worded thesis that

Small *Atomes* of themselves a *World* may make,
As being subtle, and of every shape:.

⁴⁹⁰ It is difficult to illustrate this point by comparing excerpts from *Poems, and Fancies* and one of her natural philosophical texts because even by the time she publishes *Philosophicall Fancies*, just a few weeks later, she has severely reduced her interest in atoms. While nearly every one of the poems in the first section of *Poems, and Fancies* explicates some aspect or power of the atom, from *Philosophicall Fancies* on, she writes exclusively about infinite matter and motion as the bedrock of the world.

⁴⁹¹ Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal-Society of London, For the Improving of Natural Knowledge* (London, 1667), 112-3.

In elaborating this thesis, she helpfully figures making a world out of multi-shaped atoms as

...when we build a house of Bricke, and Stone,
We lay them even, every one by one:
And when we finde a gap that's big, or small,
We seeke out Stones, to fit that place withall.⁴⁹²

For a lay reader, one not at all familiar with the notion of atoms, the metaphor of building a house out of differently-sized and -shaped bricks and stones provides a familiar visual for building a world, something no mere human has ever seen or can see. Occasionally using metaphor or simile is the extent of her “art” in this section. That is, she doesn’t—as she will later—elaborately and extendedly figure the atoms as fantastical fairies. In these early poems, she favors simplicity, to the point of nursery-school didacticism, over art. The opening verses of “Motion and Figure,” a poem located about halfway through this section, exemplify her intention to keep things simple:

A Figure Sphaericall, the Motion's so,
Streight Figures in a darting Motion go:
As several Figures in small Atomes bee,
So several Motions are, if we could see.⁴⁹³

Beyond the lack of simile, metaphor, or other conventionally artful devices, notice the very minimal features of poetry. Beyond the left justification of every line and capitalization of every initial word of a line, the only common feature of poetry she retains is rhyme—a feature as often associated with poems as it is with didactic nursery songs. The choice to rhyme easy words, “so” and “go,” “bee” and “see,” implies, again, that Cavendish puts meaning before art.

⁴⁹² Cavendish, “A World made by Atomes,” in *P&F*, 5.

⁴⁹³ Cavendish, “Motion and Figure,” in *P&F*, 20.

In this first section, Cavendish's rather clinical language and context-less assertions about atomic motion and effects can make it seem as if she is merely treating poetry as a vehicle for natural philosophy. However, near the end of the first section Cavendish begins to graduate from isolated, simple and plain explanations to contextualizing her notions in high philosophical debates or illustrating them as aspects of fantastical and imagined worlds. She now indulges in poetry's "great store of Fancy," its prerogative to imagine.⁴⁹⁴ Two of the section's last poems give just a taste: various and whole systems undergirded by the principles she theorizes earlier. In "It is hard to believe, that there are other Worlds in this World" Cavendish meditates on whether

in this World another World may bee,
That we do neither touch, tast, smell, hear, see.

She supports this proposition with an idea inspired by earlier meditations, an idea that recreates knowledge from poems earlier in the section, "Of Aiery Atomes" and "Of Aire." Earlier she writes that the atoms that make up air are hard to see: they are "hollow" and "subtle."⁴⁹⁵ Now, later, she channels air-atom's imperceptibility when she writes that the other worlds may be

As for example, Atomes in the Aire,
We nere perceive, although the Light be faire.⁴⁹⁶

In addition to recreating the earlier ideas, this poem stages something Cavendish does often with her poetry: she couches an assertion about nature in an imagined context in order to further speculate about nature, to provide slightly varying accounts of her nature, or to even create a fantastical variation of her world.

⁴⁹⁴ Cavendish, "To the Reader," in *P&F*, n.p.

⁴⁹⁵ Cavendish, "Of Aiery Atomes," and "Of Aire.," in *P&F*, 7.

⁴⁹⁶ Cavendish, "It is hard to believe, that there are other Worlds in this World," in *P&F*, 43.

“A World in an Eare-Ring,” illustrates this last possibility: building a whole fantastical world, contained within a lady’s earring, following Cavendish’s atomic theory. Several times, Cavendish alludes to the section’s earlier theorizing of how atoms compose and exist in different bodies, at different times, and under different conditions when she insists that, even in an earring,

There Night, and Day, and Heat, and Cold, and so
May Life, and Death, and Young, and Old, still grow.⁴⁹⁷

Earlier poems-- “What Atomes make Death,” “The difference of Atomes and Motion, in youth and age.,” “Motion is the Life of all things:”—prove this growth and provide foundation for what might otherwise sound like idiosyncratic conditions of the world (in an earring). Without these earlier foundational poems, one might idly consider but have no theory or explanation to really understand all that is involved in growth and the operations of the world. However the section’s earlier, perhaps less entertaining, and certainly more minutiae-focused, poems lay the groundwork for this this latter, grander fancy to make sense.⁴⁹⁸ These later poems, in turn, fancifully imagine a whole world picture made from the principles theorized earlier. “A World in an Eare-Ring.” and “It is hard to believe, that there are other Worlds in this World” show that her imaginings become a way to dig deeper into and vary her philosophy: to highlight its effects on, or meaning for, human life and even to extend it by recreating it in fanciful conditions.

Enabling her to re-examine her philosophy and articulate it in new ways, these imagined scenarios spur variety: they re-create and re-conjugate her philosophy in all

⁴⁹⁷ Cavendish, “A World in an Eare-Ring,” in *P&F*, 45.

⁴⁹⁸ Liza Blake also comments on different poems’ reliance on one another. See Blake, “Reading Poems (and Fancies).”

manner of situations.⁴⁹⁹ Perhaps she is trying to seek clarity through variety, but whatever the intention, fancy is feeding the momentum for this volume that constantly and variously re-formulates her philosophy in different imagined contexts.

The first clasp marks an official graduation to these “new Fancies,” new fancies that continue in the vein of the last section’s final two poems and indicate Cavendish’s readiness to re-create atomic behavior and effects in imagined, elaborate, and human-centered situations.⁵⁰⁰ The second section’s poems conceive of the world from a larger scale, but they very much retain an impression of the first section. Poems in the second section re-create atomistic motion by instantiating this motion in larger and more complex entities and ideas. What is re-created is not an image of the atom itself in motion at a larger scale—as if it were under a microscope. Instead, Cavendish embodies the atom’s *ethos*—especially its motion—in various and sundry larger entities that atoms compose.

Life-after-death, thoughts, and wit all apparently exhibit atomic motion. The poems in this section reveal this fact in snapshots of dialogues: two to four atomically-composed entities discussing their atomistic-vitalist natures. For example, in a dialogue between Man and Nature, Man laments that he does not know his purpose or life-after-death, but atomist-vitalism provides a way to imagine it:

Whether to Atomes turne, or Heaven up flye,
Or into new Formes change, and never dye.
Or else to Matter Prime to fall againe,
From thence to take new Formes, and so remaine.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁹ See Hero Chalmers, “‘Flattering Division’: Margaret Cavendish’s Poetics of Variety,” in *Authorial Conquests: Essays on Genre in the Writings of Margaret Cavendish*, ed. Line Cottegnies and Nancy Weitz (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), 123-44, esp. 124.

⁵⁰⁰ Brandie Siegfried argues that each section builds on the previous one. See Brandie Siegfried, introduction to *Poems and Fancies with The Animal Parliament*, by Margaret Cavendish, ed. Brandie Siegfried (Toronto: Iter Press, 2018), esp. 22-32.

⁵⁰¹ Cavendish, “A Dialogue betwixt Man, and Nature,” in *P&F*, 58.

Perhaps after death he'll simply turn into atoms, or maybe he'll adopt their motions—fly up to heaven, exist for all eternity, or turn into another shape. In this dialogue, atomic motion is not something only atoms exhibit; atomic motion now constitutes a worldview. Atoms' tendency toward speedy or restless flight recurs as a concern for the Body in "A Dialogue betwixt the Body, and the Mind;," when the Body repeats a complaint Cavendish herself articulates about restless thoughts: that they are "Alwaies in Motion, never quiet lye."⁵⁰² According to the Body, thoughts move exactly as atoms do—constantly. Finally, in "A Dialogue betwixt Wit, and Beauty," wit claims the power to ignite the atomist-vitalism Cavendish theorizes as one of its integral characteristics. Wit describes itself as developing new inventions in order to "ease the Body, and recreate the Mind." It also serves the mind and sense with "delight[t] in Change," providing

what is new, and strange
...To please the Eye, new Formes, and Fashions raise.⁵⁰³

Recreation, change, newness, and infinite motion—all attributes or effects of atomic motion—are expressed here as attributes of the larger entities atoms compose. In this section Cavendish pursues variety in two ways: in the topics she addresses and in the practice of re-creating atomic motion as an attribute of all manner of entities and notions.

Following the second section of poems, the poem that begins the second clasp indicates that the next section will rein in one kind of the previous section's variety—its various topics—but let the other—practices that produce variety—run free. The clasp poem, pleading for a style that "Nature frames, not Art," hints that *Poems, and Fancies'* third section will largely reflect on Nature as a system and nature's style. Indeed, the

⁵⁰² Cavendish, "A Dialogue betwixt the Body, and the Mind," in *P&F*, 60.

⁵⁰³ Cavendish, "A Dialogue betwixt Wit, and Beauty," in *P&F*, 81-2.

section meditates on “Natures Dresse,” “Natures Officers,” and “Natures House.” When not explicitly dedicated to *explaining* some aspect of nature, the poems in this section are dedicated to *comparing* or “similizing” worldly things to parts of the natural world (or vice versa)—like the brain to a garden, the head of man to a hive of bees, and also winds to music, clouds to horses, and birds to a ship. Unlike the dialogues of the preceding section—wherein the interlocutors try to establish a sense of themselves distinct from their partner—similizing puts one thing in terms of another in a way that suggests the inter-relation of all things. Therefore, the poems here that similize appear to share the ethic of Cavendish’s philosophy: that all things are simply varieties of one nature—infinite degrees, motions, and parts of one nature.

In the second clasp Cavendish teaches how poets should demonstrate that their work follows this ethic and adopts Nature’s style. At first this lesson is implicit: staying true to nature’s unregulated motion, the poems that follow the clasp poem address wildly diverse topics—hunting a hare and a stag and two allegorical portrayals of Britain’s ruin—before wandering back to address poets in an essay followed by a poem. In the essay and poem, Cavendish vacillates between contempt for poets and insisting that if anyone should think her book “Non-sense,” they should ask a poet to explain it to them. She begins the essay explosively: “There is no Spirit frights me so much as Poets Satyrs, and their Faiery Wits: which are so subtle, aiery, and nimble, as they passe through every small Crevice, and Cranie of Errours, and Mistakes, and dance upon every Line, and round every Fancy.”⁵⁰⁴ What appears, at first, to be a universal dismissal of poets—of which she is undoubtedly one—softens in the following poem into criticism of a certain

⁵⁰⁴ Cavendish, “To Poets,” in *P&F*, 121.

kind of poet, a poet derided equally by the likes of Ben Jonson: the one who plucks lines from Homer, Ovid, and Horace and makes a suit

to weare,
Of several Patches stole, both here, and there.⁵⁰⁵

In line with the sentiments on imitation and fancy she expresses elsewhere, Cavendish opposes the thieving poet—one we could describe as “imitating” in the traditional sense of trying to resemble another—to the one who truly invents:

There's None should Places have in Fames high Court,
But those that first do win Inventions Fort.⁵⁰⁶

Carrying this clear preference for invention back to the preceding essay, one hopes it would clarify how Cavendish characterizes herself and her practice among and against the poets she fears. But one is met with a strange contradiction instead. While Cavendish upholds her desire for a style inspired by nature, in this essay she implies that the best way to achieve nature's style is to imitate the very poets she criticizes: “yet [Nature] is pleased when [poets] imitate her; and to imitate her, I hope you [poets] will be pleased, I imitate you.”⁵⁰⁷ Cavendish's apparent appreciation now of poets is difficult enough to explain without the fact that she invokes imitation, in tension with invention, to describe her practice. However, we can explain this seeming inconsistency if we retrain our attention back to the principles of nature that Cavendish reiterates: infinite motion and variety. Poets who imitate nature produce infinite motion and variety; they do not repeat procedures that expect replication or a product that resembles its original. Cavendish's “imitation” will follow suit—not striving to resemble or take from what other poets have

⁵⁰⁵ Cavendish, “Of Poets, and their Theft,” in *P&F*, 124. Jonson wrote a whole play satirizing these impostures, *Poetaster, or the Arraignment* (1601).

⁵⁰⁶ Cavendish, “Of Poets, and their Theft,” in *P&F*, 123.

⁵⁰⁷ Cavendish, “To Poets,” in *P&F*, 122.

done, but proliferating variety just as nature does.

In the third section following this clasp, a return to thinking about poetic process reminds us that whatever we call poesy's process, it fundamentally aims toward variety, just as Nature does. Cavendish begins the poem "Poets have most Pleasure in this Life" with a seemingly clear articulation of Nature, fancy, and variety's relationship:

Nature most Pleasure doth to Poets give;
If Pleasures in Variety do live.
There every Sense by Fancy new is fed.⁵⁰⁸

What is clear in these lines is that poetry channels Nature's variety. What is less clear is how Poets feel about carrying such a burden. While assertive in tone, the first line is importantly ambiguous in meaning: it's unclear who derives pleasure from variety, whether Nature gives what she finds pleasurable, or if the poet is pleased by variety. If we read this line earnestly, poets enjoy a superior bond with Nature wherein Nature gifts her favorite, poets, with representing the most pleasing thing in her store, variety.

Cavendish insinuates, then, that poets have a more privileged relationship to Nature than, say, natural philosophers do. While both poetry and natural philosophy represent Nature, poetry, she implies, is particularly capable of representing Nature's favorite attribute. But what if variety does not please poets as much as it pleases Nature? The second line's wry conditional, if variety is really pleasurable, questions whether poets willingly and enthusiastically accept the task to represent the attribute Nature enjoys and cultivates. Yet the final line resists the impression that Nature places any unwelcome pressure on poets: Poets apparently feed variety with their characteristic fancy and thus recharge variety. Variety and fancy are, therefore, symbiotic; poetry's fancy proposes even more—and

⁵⁰⁸ Cavendish, "Poets have most Pleasure in this Life," in *P&F*, 152.

new—varieties in Nature than we might initially see or sense in Nature.⁵⁰⁹ Casting variety as something that Nature and fancy pass back and forth, each trying to produce new varieties the other hasn't figured, Cavendish also implies how fancy joins Nature in creating and maintaining recreative and infinite matter and motion.

In this volume, Cavendish undeniably treats poetry and fancy as partners with nature. Not just in the obvious natural philosophical poems that begin the volume but also in the formal (what I've called "macropoetic") attributes of the text, Cavendish illustrates nature's atomist-vitalist motion. What makes her poems and fancies "partners" with nature is that beyond describing or insinuating motion in their conceits, Cavendish attempts to capture motion in the clasps. Thus, the clasps themselves illustrate the motion she theorizes: in their content and in how they function as part of the larger text, they demonstrate variety and infinite motion. Though their designation suggests that the clasps primarily function to join sections, in content they rather amplify the chaotic motion that captivates Cavendish, a motion that does not necessarily induce or result in continuity. Nevertheless, the clasps *do* provide something like continuity: they act as primers for each section that will portray this chaotic self-motion at increasingly larger scales—beginning at the atomic scale, then at the level of dialogues between worldly entities, and finally how Nature is a system invested in infinite motion. The scaling up also suggests Cavendish's interest in exploring the pervasiveness of self-motion, how it manifests in everything and at every cosmological scale: how Nature is a self-moving system, just as atoms self-move, just as her thoughts self-move. The strongest proof for her captivation with self-motion is not even that she continues to amass examples of this movement in

⁵⁰⁹ See Eggert's analysis that Cavendish "makes the literary imagination part of the very preconditions—the growth medium, as it were—of all thought and all physical matter. Eggert, *Disknowledge*, 232.

nature but that she develops and specifies it as particular processes in which she participates. In the first clasp poem she appears frustrated and thrown onto her back foot by the inexhaustible and frenetic motion of her thoughts, but in the second clasp poem she celebrates and yearns for her poetic style to take after nature's free and wild motion. Her fancies take after nature but in motions she theorizes and illustrates as particular to fancy: recreation, diversion, and withdrawal.

By the end of her career, it becomes clear that Cavendish has been writing her fanciful texts with these variety-producing practices in mind and therefore theorizing and illustrating how fancy acts as *another* nature. That is, defining specific motions with which fancy creates—creates even whole worlds within worlds and worlds within an earring—Cavendish devises fancy as a variety of nature. Fancy is another world-making agent—a world-making agent with its own, specific protocols.

Recreation, Diversion, and Withdrawal in *The Blazing World*

Both Cavendish's husband and frequent prefacer, William, and Cavendish herself associate her fancy with creation: the former, in fact, modifies her fancy as "your *creating* Fancy,"⁵¹⁰ and the latter describes fancy's motions as "a voluntary creation or production of the mind."⁵¹¹ But the actions the authoress assigns to fancy indicate that her fancy does not simply reproduce what nature creates. Her Fancy "recreate[s] the mind, and withdraw[s] it from its more serious contemplations"; it "divert[s] [her] studious

⁵¹⁰ Cavendish, "To The Duchess of Newcastle, on Her New Blazing World," in *BW*, 121. Emphasis added.

⁵¹¹ Cavendish, "To the Reader," in *BW*, 123.

thoughts” and “delight[s] the reader with variety.”⁵¹² Specifying recreation, diversion, and withdrawal as operations that encourage and produce variety, Cavendish emphasizes fancy’s Nature-like tendencies and operations, but she pointedly distinguishes their products. Fancy does not necessarily enlighten us about the world, even as it might engage practices—recreation, diversion, withdrawal—that occur in the world. Fancy proliferates variety by recreating another kind of Nature. Cavendish’s sustained invention of a new world in *The Blazing World* exemplifies this recreation of a nature with its own set of fantastical principles.

Readers of this romancical-philosophical-fantastical prose story and the text’s main character, an unnamed young lady turned unnamed Empress, experience a gradual easing into the fantasy together. The story opens in an unknown location, but, containing a North Pole, it appears to be in a world familiar to readers and Cavendish. Here lives a young lady, desired by a sea merchant who kidnaps her. Heaven frowns on this crime and so whips the boat up in a tempest that carries it through a passage from the North Pole to a pole that adjoins this world to another one, the Blazing World. The only survivor of this fateful journey, the lady is saved by inhabitants of the Blazing World: “strange creatures, in shape like bears, only they went uprights as men.”⁵¹³ The focus on the creatures’ hybridity helps to maintain a gradual easing into the fantastical world while also prompting the reader to notice the new strangeness of this world, how it recreates and makes a variation of the world from which the lady came.

The welcoming creatures then convey the lady throughout the world, subjecting her to a condition familiar from Cavendish’s own world: constant motion. Bear-men

⁵¹² Cavendish, “To the Reader,” in *BW*, 124.

⁵¹³ Cavendish, *BW*, 127.

remove her from the boat and, “show[ing] her all civility and kindness imaginable,” try to find a comfortable place for her to rest in their underground caves. However, they quickly observe that “her constitution neither agreed with the temper of that climate, nor their diet, [and] they were resolved to carry her into another island of a warmer temper.” So the bear-men pass the lady off to upright-walking “men like foxes” who treat her equally as civilly. The fox-men eventually decide “to make her a present” to the Emperor of their world, and so they carry the lady to the bird-men, who join the convoy to the satyrs, and then on to the green-men.⁵¹⁴ All together convey her through the narrow and labyrinthine straits to the Emperor’s palace. Despite the strange and fantastical characters, the situation is in fact a thoroughly normal expression of what Cavendish apparently observes in her own natural world: the lady’s constant motion from one location to the next exemplifies constant motion and recreating. More specifically, this motion is both diversion and withdrawal. Although not yet voluntarily, the lady is diverted or withdrawn from one place to another to suit her comfort.

This subtle illustration of infinite motion primes the reader for direct assertions about the nature of this world—assertions that recreate statements and principles from her pure natural philosophies. Marrying the Emperor, the lady wants to learn more about her new home and so calls together, first, priests and statemen to learn about the Blazing World’s religion and government and then hybrid animal-men of many kinds who serve as the world’s natural philosophers. In addition to telling her of the sun, moon, and celestial bodies, the bird-men articulate one of the pillars of Cavendish’s philosophy, which she has expressed in both fanciful and philosophical texts alike: “for nature is so

⁵¹⁴ Cavendish, *BW*, 127.

full of variety, that our weak sense cannot perceive all the various sorts of her creatures.”⁵¹⁵ The bird-men lead the parade of natural philosophers who all inform the Empress of familiar aspects of this world, like that its nature is “eternal and infinite, and her particulars are subject to infinite changes and transmutations by virtue of their own corporeal, figurative self-motions.”⁵¹⁶ The Empress, herself, like Cavendish, will recreate this principle several more times over the course of the text, including as “nature is but one infinite self-moving body, which by the virtue of its self-motion, is divided into infinite parts, which parts being restless, undergo perpetual changes and transmutations by their infinite compositions and divisions.”⁵¹⁷ This recreation of a familiar principle includes a set of specific practices by which nature changes: through infinite composition and division. Not only, then, does *The Blazing World* preach recreation, but it specifies the processes by which creation happens in this fanciful world—by combination and recombination.

The text dilates on combination and recombination as creative habits when the fish- and worm-men explain procreation to the Empress. The Empress asks, “whether all animal creatures did continue their species by a successive propagation of particulars, and whether in every species the off-spring did always resemble their generator or producer, both in their interior and exterior figures?” Her question implies what she believes is the normal procreative process: succession of particulars so that the offspring *resembles* the parent. However, the fish-men respond that “some species...were kept up by a successive propagation of an offspring that was like the producer, but some were not.”⁵¹⁸ The

⁵¹⁵ Cavendish, *BW*, 138.

⁵¹⁶ Cavendish, *BW*, 153.

⁵¹⁷ Cavendish, *BW*, 154. See also 157 and 176.

⁵¹⁸ Cavendish, *BW*, 147.

production of insects, for example, “proceeds from such causes as have no conformity or likeness with their produced effects; as for example, maggots bred out of cheese, and several others generated out of earth, water, and the like.”⁵¹⁹ This explanation suggests the variety possible in procreation—some offspring look like their parents, some do not. It also suggests that procreation can follow a variety of processes: “successive propagation” *and* whatever we might call the process by which cheese births maggots. The worm-men also relay one more procreative process. Describing seed procreation, they tell the Empress that the division of one seed produces a number of seeds “out of itself.” She, confused, asks how parthenogenesis is possible, which prompts them to clarify that the seeds “increase not barely of themselves, but by joining and commixing with other parts.”⁵²⁰ Thus, recombination is a third procreative process that seeds apparently follow. This method, procreation by recombination, has implications for Cavendish’s fanciful methods as well. Because Cavendish aligns fancy’s and nature’s processes, this explanation of procreation—a kind of re-creation—as recombination and variety-producing opens the door to see fancy as, likewise, a process of recombination instead of replication.

In this text, the collision of romance, natural philosophy, and fantasy exemplifies recombination, instead of replication, as fancy’s method.⁵²¹ The text begins as a fantasy-romance with the lady-turned-Empress’ journey through the adjoined poles of two worlds to a world where animal-men philosophers tutor her. Just as a reader might be starting to

⁵¹⁹ Cavendish, *BW*, 147.

⁵²⁰ Cavendish, *BW*, 152.

⁵²¹ See Eggert, *Disknowledge*, 239: “Cavendish has created her Blazing World through the same kind of nonsexual production that she attributes to nature: she has organized ‘the parts of [her] mind’ in the same way that parts of nature...combine and recombine in order to form novel productions.”

acclimate to these unusual teachers, more fancy and romance enter into the text. First, the animal-philosophers suggest the Empress should visit with immaterial spirits, entities that absolutely cannot exist in Cavendish's real-world materialism. I'll say more about the significance of the immaterial spirits below, but, among the reasons they are important: they testify to fancy's power to create a truly distinct nature because they cannot exist in the nature Cavendish knows. Thus, they are perhaps the most explicit example of fancy in Cavendish's text, yet these paragons of fancy tutor the Empress in more topics of natural philosophy. They exemplify the text's collision of fantasy and natural philosophy.

The text ends with a very personal romancical-fantastical endeavor for the Empress, one assisted by the technologies the Blazing World's creatures have constructed by harnessing the powers of their nature. At the beginning of the text's second part, hearing that the world from which she came has devolved into conflict, the Empress assembles the Blazing World's advanced and intimidating technologies to defend her home nation. (In a sense, Cavendish portrays what would happen if Salomon's House turned armory.) With technology that temporarily turns her ships into submersibles and a great quantity of fire-stone which her bird-men drop on enemy ships, she assists her native country in winning a first war. Her native country then enslaves the losing communities. After some time, these nations rebel and the king of her former land calls on the Empress' fantastical services again. Her bird-men then rain fire down on the cities that refuse to submit, enabling the king to regain control. The second part of this text reads as if Cavendish just layers genres, one on top of another: a personal journey to save the nation from which she came involves the Empress enlisting advances, born from the work of the Blazing World's natural philosophers, that seem all the more fantastical when

deployed in a world that does not know these devices. At one point, after the bird-men hit the rebel towns once with fire-stone, they warn the inhabitants that when it rains again fire will engulf their town. The inhabitants are “amazed to hear men speak in the air; but withal they laughed when they heard them say that rain should fire their towns, knowing that the effect of water was to quench, not produce fire.”⁵²² The inhabitants’ hubris and ignorance is unfortunately corrected when it rains. Moments like these—like when Cavendish combines the fantasy of bird-men explaining and deploying a technology made from the nature of their world—illustrate Cavendish’s process for creating fancy by combining fantasy and natural philosophy.

As much as she relies on combination as a process for developing her fancy, she likewise enlists diversion and withdrawal as methods of fancy-making. Two purely imaginative products—the presence of immaterial spirits and the creation of worlds within worlds—illustrate diversion and withdrawal from the natural philosophy Cavendish theorizes in her purer philosophical texts. The presence of immaterial spirits as tutors is particularly perplexing given Cavendish’s repeated insistence throughout her natural philosophies that nothing immaterial exists; everything in the world is made of one matter. Even more perplexing, however, is if—despite their name—the immaterial spirits are actually immaterial. Confusingly, the supposed “immaterial” spirits expressly deny immateriality, explaining to the Empress, “that it was as much nonsense to say, an immaterial figure, as to say an immaterial body.”⁵²³ Indeed, using explanations from other animal philosophers in the text and the spirits themselves, scholars have argued that the immaterial spirits are not immaterial but rather “as immaterial as one can become in a

⁵²² Cavendish, *BW*, 214.

⁵²³ Cavendish, *BW*, 169.

material universe.”⁵²⁴ Yet in places the spirits contradict themselves, insisting that they *are* immaterial, though they are confined to material vehicles.⁵²⁵ Some have endeavored to reason why the spirits appear to contradict themselves just pages apart and also why Cavendish creates this extra wrinkle in her natural philosophy—that immateriality *may be* possible as long as the entity always presents in material form. Carlos Santana, for example, argues that the spirits exemplify “nature’s infinite complexity”—complex to the point of paradox.⁵²⁶ By diverting and withdrawing from her own philosophy, Cavendish shows the seriousness of her commitment to one of the central tenets of her philosophy, infinite variety.

It is precisely to the immaterial spirits that we should turn in order to understand diversion and withdrawal as poetic processes. The text indicates their usefulness in this endeavor by emphasizing that as the purest, rarest, lightest, and most agile sort of matter, they move quickly and suddenly.⁵²⁷ And then they do. At possibly the most important part of the conversation between the Empress and the spirits, when she asserts her wish to write “the Jews’ Cabbala” as none—not John Dee nor his associate Edward Kelly—had been able to do, the spirits immediately disappear.⁵²⁸ Alarmed, the Empress dispatches her fly-men and worm-men to search high and in the hollows of the earth for the spirits. After a short time, the worm-men inform her that they spoke to creatures in the center of

⁵²⁴ Thell, “[A]s lightly as two thoughts,” 24.

⁵²⁵ Cavendish, *BW*, 169.

⁵²⁶ Carlos Santana, “‘Two Opposite Things Placed Near Each Other, Are the Better Discerned’: Philosophical Readings of Cavendish’s Literary Output,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 23, no. 2 (2015): 299, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2014.1002073>. For more on Cavendish’s philosophical views on immaterial spirits, especially as they compare to those of Hobbes, More, and other contemporaries, see Emma Wilkins, “‘Exploding’ immaterial substances: Margaret Cavendish’s vitalist-materialist critique of spirits,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 24, no. 5 (2016): 858-77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2016.1210567>.

⁵²⁷ Cavendish, *BW*, 168.

⁵²⁸ Cavendish, *BW*, 179.

the earth who told them that the spirits were there for a time, but then they flitted away to “the antipodes on the other side of the terrestrial globe, diametrically opposite to theirs.”⁵²⁹ Eventually, with no explanation for the disappearance, one of the spirits returns to the Empress and resumes the discussion as if no interruption had occurred. Making the supremely fanciful (in fact reserved for fancy) immaterial spirits embody and enact diversion and withdrawal underscores the centrality of these processes to her fancy-making.

Indeed, the principles they stand for—diversion and withdrawal—are foundational to the text’s philosophy for fantastical world-building. When the discussion about the Empress making the Jews’ Cabbala resumes, the spirits suggest she employ a scribe, who “although she is not one of the most learned, eloquent, witty and ingenious, yet is she a plain and rational writer, for the principle of her writings, is sense and reason.”⁵³⁰ The lady they suggest is the Duchess of Newcastle—also known, though not in the text, as the author of this story, Margaret Cavendish. The Duchess’ soul is summoned to the Blazing World, where it doesn’t take her very long to convince the Empress that neither is qualified to write the Jews’ Cabbala, and after a series of proposals—a philosophical cabbala, a moral cabbala, a political cabbala—the Duchess convinces the Empress to make a “poetical or romancical Cabbala, wherein you can use metaphors, allegories, similitudes, etc. and interpret them as you please.”⁵³¹ It’s unclear if this cabbala ever materializes; we readers certainly never read it or, for that matter, hear about it again. Yet the Duchess and Empress become fast friends, with the Duchess’s soul

⁵²⁹ Cavendish, *BW*, 180.

⁵³⁰ Cavendish, *BW*, 181.

⁵³¹ Cavendish, *BW*, 183.

shuttling back and forth between this world and her own. One time when the Duchess' soul is in the Blazing World, the Empress observes that her friend appears sad, to which the Duchess reports that she has an extreme ambition to be a "great princess."⁵³² The Empress asks the spirits whether there is a world of which the Duchess can herself be empress. They tell her there are numerous worlds, but they are all already claimed. Their consolation, however, is that the Duchess can create her own world over which she can preside. So, guided by their fancy, the Duchess and Empress set to work creating new worlds.

The Duchess creates a number of unsatisfying worlds, unsatisfying because she constructs them according to the philosophies of others—first of Thales and then of Pythagoras, then of Plato, Epicurus, Aristotle, Descartes, and Hobbes. Finally, seeing "that no patterns would do her any good in the framing of her world; she resolved to make a world of her own invention."⁵³³ This resolution recalls Cavendish's assessment that creation by invention, not by patterning, distinguishes fancy from imitation—that fancy does not imitate at all, but rather creates. Meanwhile, the Empress experiences similar trouble in creating a world and ultimately wants to see the Duchess' world. Enthralled with the Duchess' world, the Empress decides she just wants to live in the Duchess' world, to which the Duchess encourages her to rather "make such another world in her own mind."⁵³⁴ The creation philosophy realized here by both creatoresses champions diversion and withdrawal. The Duchess diverts herself from and withdraws from the versions she makes that are patterned after others' ideas. Then she insists that

⁵³² Cavendish, *BW*, 183.

⁵³³ Cavendish, *BW*, 188.

⁵³⁴ Cavendish, *BW*, 189.

the Empress do the same: keep working to create her own world instead of inhabiting another's. The moral and method are clear: fanciful creation requires diverting and withdrawing from prior models.

These powers and responsibilities Cavendish extends to her readers as well. In the Epilogue, for the first time identifying herself as the text's Duchess of Newcastle, a "dear Platonic friend" to the Empress, Cavendish insists that she is not a conqueror like Alexander the Great or Caesar.⁵³⁵ Rather an "Authoress," she encourages others not to conquer but to author—to create something of their own.⁵³⁶

[I]f any should like the world I have made, and be willing to be my subjects, they may imagine themselves such, I mean, in their minds, fancies or imaginations; but if they cannot endure to be subjects, they may create worlds of their own, and govern them as they please: but yet let them have a care, not to prove unjust usurpers, and to rob me of mine.⁵³⁷

Offering only two choices—either be a subject in the world she has created or create worlds of one's own—Cavendish opposes conformity and creation. She aligns the latter with a motion away from, expulsion, diversion and withdrawal from, an established world. Furthermore, she subtly links the movements to a central component of nature and fancy, variety. Here she unequivocally encourages that proliferating different worlds requires departing, diverting, and withdrawing from her own. In terms of the development of her text, she practices this principle as well.

The story begins in the Lady's world, moves to the Blazing World, and from there the Duchess and Empress create their own individuated worlds, while also occasionally visiting the world the Duchess typically inhabits and also the world from which the Lady-

⁵³⁵ Cavendish, *BW*, 225.

⁵³⁶ Cavendish, *BW*, 224.

⁵³⁷ Cavendish, *BW*, 225.

turned-Empress came. These worlds don't build on one another necessarily, with clear connections or continuities forming between each one. In fact, the one time the Empress tries to engineer a kind of connection by choosing to inhabit the Duchess' world instead of creating her own, the Duchess expressly advises her to "make such another world."⁵³⁸ Though she doesn't state to what extent the Empress' world could resemble or diverge from her own, the simple action itself, dismissing the Empress, realizes what must fundamentally happen in order to create: the Empress must withdraw from the Duchess' example. Finally, with these successive withdrawals and diversions, the text models its procedures for re-creation—a process without a telos or expected path, a process that does not necessarily consider or seek physical or qualitative resemblance or replication. The various worlds exemplify re-creation as a process of withdrawing from one thing and creating another through actions, and with results, that are as distinct as the creators themselves.

This chapter has taken texts from the extreme ends of Cavendish's career as a writer of fancy, *Poems, and Fancies* and *The Blazing World*, and studied how they materialize motions and methods that invest fancy in nature's project to create and sustain variety. The fact that fancy complements nature in this way enlightens seventeenth-century developments in both poesy and natural philosophy. Cavendish's natural philosophy foregrounds change and transformation as the foundational characteristics of nature with some of the most intense conviction and amplest theorizing that we see from any of her colleagues or predecessors in the period. In fact, when it comes to the period's anxiety around language's ability to represent nature, Cavendish

⁵³⁸ Cavendish, *BW*, 189.

takes a distinctly more consistent position than Bacon, Hobbes, and Sprat do. I mean “consistent” in that the overwhelming objective of seventeenth-century natural philosophers was to refashion ways of representing and discovering the world.

Transformation was their expressed goal, but overwhelmingly (and ironically), this meant setting restrictions on what kind of language to use, stabilizing nature, or developing a set of restrictive and unchanging procedures for illuminating nature’s ontology. Cavendish deploys language in a way that is consistent with her natural philosophy: just as she insists that the world is infinitely and constantly changing, she attempts to represent this principle in all aspects of literary representation—from the images she creates to the construction of her texts. In this way, she changes what words do and represent. Words don’t make stable products; they rather preserve nature’s persistent dynamism and unpredictable irregularity.

More than accentuating how Cavendish renovates language’s purposes and capabilities, especially as they cooperated with the seventeenth-century’s changing attitudes about nature and natural philosophy, the project of this section—and of the chapter as a whole—has been to illuminate and unpack Cavendish’s procedures for fancy-making: recreation, diversion, and withdrawal. With these procedures, it perhaps appears that we have moved quite far from Sidney’s conception of poesy as “an art of imitation.” Yet I contend that Cavendish, like Shakespeare and Middleton, elaborates Sidney’s often opaque theory. She shows and theorizes *how* bringing forth forms such as never were in nature happens. Undeniably, though, she refashions what we think of as “poesy”: not a process that necessarily expects resemblance but one that can just as truthfully be described as disorder—chaotic, unpatterned, and unending.

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