

Pagan Fictions: Literature and False Religion in England, 1550–1650

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ABSTRACT

JOSEPH WALLACE: *Pagan Fictions: Literature and False Religion in England, 1550–1650*
(Under the direction of Reid Barbour and Jessica Wolfe)

This dissertation represents an effort to rethink one of the defining problems of the European Renaissance: the revival of pagan culture. It was very common for Renaissance Christians, from Giovanni Boccaccio to John Calvin, to argue that pagan religions were false because they were based on myths created by poets and politicians. But the Reformation project of distinguishing true from false versions of Christian religion blurred the boundaries between ancient and more recent versions of false religion. The hinge of this reorientation of religious values was the argument that certain religions were merely poetic fables, artificial fictions created by humans. And while some scholars have discussed the changing meaning of religion in the seventeenth century, no one has seen that literary language provided the terms for this change. My project corrects this by juxtaposing the religious imagery of the poetry of Robert Herrick, John Milton, and many others with contemporary debates about the poetic nature of religious imagery. In this way, my project makes a unique contribution to Renaissance studies by demonstrating not only that literary categories are fundamental to an understanding of religion, but also that the religious revolution of the Reformation produced lasting changes in how literary texts create meaning.

For my parents, Lucy and Steve Wallace

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Poetry, Pagan Theology, and the Creation of False Religion

In 1781, the historian Edward Gibbon wrote that “The ruin of Paganism, in the age of Theodosius, is perhaps the only example of the total extirpation of any ancient and popular superstition; and may therefore deserve to be considered as a singular event in the history of the human mind.”¹ The scourge of paganism was, for Gibbon, the “zeal” of the Christians, a zeal that raged against the cooler sense of “human prudence” (2:78). Gibbon laments not the loss of paganism’s “superstitious” theology but its social function and its artistic elegance. In fact, Gibbon seems to value the fact that paganism reveled in human creations rather than an abstracting religious zeal that subsumed all within its spirit. But what most provokes Gibbon, in his sarcastically excoriating way, is the way that the forces of laws and empire were marshaled to end what was a deeply ingrained social, political, devotional, and artistic system.

The destruction of pagan *arts* had long produced a sense of loss for Renaissance intellectuals, too. Lorenzo Ghiberti, for example, in a much-quoted passage from his *Commentaries*, wrote,

The Christian faith achieved victory in the time of the Emperor Constantine and Pope Sylvester. Idolatry was most stringently persecuted so that all statues and pictures, noble, and of antique and perfect venerability as they were, were destroyed and rent to pieces. With the statues and pictures were consumed books, commentaries, drawings and the rules by which one could learn such noble and excellent arts. In

¹ Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. David Womersley, 3 vols. (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Press, 1994), 2:71. Further references will appear in the text.

order to abolish every ancient custom of idolatry it was decreed that all the temples should be white. At this time the most severe penalty was ordered for anyone who made any statue or picture. Thus ended the art of sculpture and painting and all the knowledge and skill that had been achieved in it. Art came to an end and the temples remained white for about six hundred years.²

Ghiberti clearly regretted the “false choice between art and religion”³ posed by the early Christians, and there is even the sense that he regretted the loss of paganism as an artistic mode, or a complete cultural system.

I begin by citing these two writers, separated by three hundred years, to demonstrate a particular failing in our interpretation of the Renaissance renewal of pagan antiquity, namely our willingness to separate the idea of “art” from the religious and political resonances of paganism. Neither Gibbon nor Ghiberti thought about the renewal of pagan arts separately from the troubling consequences of bringing back the cultural system signified by the place of art and fiction within pagan religion. As I will suggest in this introduction and in my dissertation, there is a very good reason why scholars hesitate to read pagan fictions in the way that they were read in the Renaissance. These fictions were part of a system that originated, for Renaissance artists and thinkers, from a mistake, an error with significant religious consequences. And while scholars of this period often note the language used by those in the Renaissance to describe pagan errors, we rarely parse it, nor do we try to find out what it might mean, outside of the grand narrative of Christian history, to claim that pagan religion was created by “demons” and that those demons exerted control over the secular functions of government and other social institutions. Yet, it is clear that this idea meant a

² Quoted in Tilmann Buddensieg, “Gregory the Great, the Destroyer of Pagan Idols: The History of a Medieval Legend Concerning the Decline of Ancient Art and Literature,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 28 (1965): 44.

³ Larry Silver, “Full of Grace: ‘Mariolatry’ in Post-Reformation Germany,” in *The Idol in the Age of Art: Objects, Devotions and the Early Modern World*, ed. Michael W. Cole and Rebecca Zorach (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 290.

great deal to Renaissance writers, who struggled mightily to suppress and reinterpret the troubling connotations of a revival of ancient religion at the same time that they accepted the grandeur of pagan art. For those writers, ancient polytheism was, among other things, a political religion, one in which the fictions of the poets and artists had a symbiotic relationship with the priests and statesmen who relied on them to control the imaginations of the masses.

My dissertation is an attempt to yoke together pagan arts and pagan religions once again. I do this to argue that the neglect of the genuine and serious religious dimension of the renewal of antiquity and its arts has led us to persistently mischaracterize the Renaissance notion of ancient culture. Where early moderns saw disruption and conflict, moderns have seen synthesis and harmony, albeit produced by an inauthentic kind of classicism. And where modern scholars sense a misguided and naïve synthesis of pagan and Christian, there is really a consciously constructed suppression of the consequences of taking seriously the religious and political dimensions of ancient art—a refusal to speak about what it would mean for there to be a true “poetic theology.”

The kind of study I am pursuing explains how the interest in the pagan arts contributed to and interacted with the religious polemics denouncing polytheism and idolatry as trappings of a newly resurgent false religion. Furthermore, it makes the claim that the structure of polytheistic arts, their identification of the media of production with divine signification, proved to be the linchpin in the gradual transformation of early modern religious culture and the rise of comparative scholarship. In particular, my study also argues that conceptions of culture that underlie the modern secular state were produced by the

interactions among differing religious systems, with Christianity bracketing the devotional practices and objects of paganism as products of human, as opposed to divine, art.

My project proceeds, however, on a necessarily narrow scale, restraining its scope mainly to the literary art of early modern England. But its argument partakes of the wider range of investigation outlined above. I argue that we must view paganism and Christianity in the Renaissance as more radically opposed than we usually do. The compatibility of religious beliefs and practices is of course just as vigorously debated now as it was then, but the character of those Renaissance debates is central for understanding the relationship between cultural products, which we as literary scholars study, and the religious structures that legitimated, regulated, rejected, and ultimately created them. The shifting place of human art within religious thought unites the literary artists I discuss with the religious writers who debated the nature of false religion and the merits of competing religious values.

My study also fits into modern scholarship's reevaluation of the changes in religious culture of the early modern period. There is an influential critical narrative that holds that a kind of secular paganism developed in the Italian Renaissance and, through successive refinements of post-Reformation scholarship and philology, culminated in the faith in natural philosophy and in reason that structured the Enlightenment response to religious enthusiasm. Peter Gay's argument that the Enlightenment saw "the rise of modern paganism" is an eloquent expansion of the idea that the legacy of the pagan renewal was to wed the rational and natural philosophies of the classical philosophers with a way of living in the present, a way of living that used natural knowledge to critique religious enthusiasm and unreason.⁴ In Gay's narrative, the development of reason is both pagan and key to understanding the erosion of Christian belief in Enlightenment, at least among its leading thinkers.

⁴ Gay, *The Enlightenment, an Interpretation: The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: Knopf, 1966), passim.

This narrative does have considerable explanatory force, but it is clear that we have to revise it. In fact, the question now is not if we should revise this narrative but how we should do it. One avenue has been to ask, as I do in my project, how religious transformations of the late seventeenth century might be linked to political and social understandings of religion itself. This kind of critical discourse sheds light on what was a key facet the reception of pagan religion and myths, the idea that this religious tradition and its rituals were fictional and therefore false. To view pagan religion in the Renaissance in this way also allows us to find new ways to talk about the power of fiction and myth itself. We need only remind ourselves of modern theories of religion—as phenomenon, or as experience—to see how the early modern idea of the power of fiction transforms into something else, though similar, in the modern world: a way to convert the profane into the sacred.

As we start to revise the narrative of secularism that takes pagan culture as its avatar, it becomes very clear that we should not equate “paganism” with what we now call the “secular” realm. But this equation has endured because “paganism” has been on both sides of the drive to so-called “secularism.” First of all, there are important ways in which the idea of “pagan” religious practices have come to be equated with “popular” religion, an idea latent in the medieval critique of lay religious rituals. But secondly, paganism was also part of the natural, rational philosophy of the Enlightenment progressives. Thus the “pagan” element in the Christian west has been a part of both Gay’s ideal of Enlightenment philosophy running against religious enthusiasm *and* an example of the irrational understanding of religion as “enchantment” that gradually ceded to rational, secular forces.⁵ This dichotomy and the

⁵ Among the many studies investigating the fate of popular religion, see especially Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, rev. ed. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1994), 208–16; Leah S. Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Achsah Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community from Herbert to Milton: Literature,*

narratives supporting it are changing. A wide range of scholarship across disciplines has proven disruptive to ideas like “paganism,” “secularization,” and “idolatry,” reminding us that they were constructions of a Christian culture that was actively questioning its own religious and political boundaries. This body of scholarship has looked to the early modern interest in political and social explanations of pagan religion and its rituals to argue for the importance of the civil, or political, theology in the religious transformations that took place during the Renaissance. This scholarship has also begun to revise notions of religious change that were formerly widely accepted, such as the secularization of European culture, the decline of religion, and the disenchantment with religious explanations of the cosmos. The result has been an inclination to see in religious culture a constantly shifting equilibrium between political, social, artistic, legal, and divine forces, a discourse structured by an uneasy alliance between belief, reason, and art.⁶ To summarize the conclusions of this scholarship, the key to modern and early modern understandings of the religious transformations of the seventeenth century was idolatry: the study of idolatry, and the urge to distinguish true

Religion, and Cultural Conflict in Seventeenth-century England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and, most extensively, Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribner, 1971).

⁶ See especially Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Robert Black, “The Donation Constantine: A New Source for the Concept of the Renaissance,” in *Language and images of Renaissance Italy*, ed. Alison Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Tobias Döring and Susanne Rupp, *Performances of the sacred in late medieval and early modern England* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005); Graham Hammill and Julia Reinhard Lupton, “Sovereigns, Citizens, and Saints: Political Theology and Renaissance Literature,” *Religion & Literature* 38, no. 3 (2006): 1–11; Robert D Linder, “Civil Religion in Historical Perspective: The Reality that Underlies the Concept,” *Journal of Church and State* 17 (1975): 399; Julia Reinhard Lupton, *Citizen-saints: Shakespeare and political theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); John M. Najemy, “Papirius and the Chickens, or Machiavelli on the Necessity of Interpreting Religion,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60 (1999): 659–681; Lodi Nauta, “Hobbes on Religion and the Church between The Elements of Law and Leviathan: A Dramatic Change of Direction?,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63 (2002): 577–598; *The Sacred and Profane in English Renaissance literature*, ed. Mary Arshagouni Papazian (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008); Jonathan Sheehan, “Sacrifice Before the Secular,” *Representations* 105 (2009): 12–36; Guy G. Stroumsa, “John Spencer and the Roots of Idolatry,” *History of Religions* 41, no. 1 (2001): 1–23; Elliott Visconsi, “The Invention of Criminal Blasphemy: Rex v. Taylor (1676),” *Representations* 103, no. 1 (2008): 30–52; and Alexandra Walsham, “The Reformation and ‘the Disenchantment of the World’ Reassessed,” *The Historical Journal* 51 (2008): 497–528.

religion from false, set up the terms in which religion could be defined in anthropological terms. As Jonathan Sheehan sums it up, “by embedding idolatry within the matrix of human nature and by making religion a matter of practice, the theoreticians and scholars of idolatry established the categories for the anthropological investigation of human religion.” For Sheehan, this embedding does not diminish the power of religion but rather shows it to be a human construct whose terms—like “sacred” and “profane”—suddenly opened up to new definitions.⁷

The one thing all these studies seem to have in common is that they argue, implicitly or not, that the basic idea behind the religious transformations of the early modern period is that religion was increasingly seen as something to be manipulated: a human creation that existed to foster necessary bonds of polity, society, and community. Another way of arguing this is to say that as “religion” came to be defined primarily in terms of interior piety it also became separable from the exoteric rituals of popular culture; once this happened, the history of religions is best described as a history of fictions, a history of representations, whether human or divine. Baruch Spinoza provided a crucial argument of this sort in the late seventeenth century, and his influence is evident in a wide range of modern intellectual disciplines. Spinoza’s method of interpretation prizes contextualization and natural causation to explain the history of religious revelation, which appears as a series of socially useful devices accommodated to specific peoples at specific times. Religion, Spinoza argues, is principally an internal affair, a product of piety conformed to the universal moral order. He calls religion “the universal divine law,” which consists not in “external actions” but in

⁷ Sheehan, “Sacred and Profane: Idolatry, Antiquarianism and the Polemics of Distinction in the Seventeenth Century,” *Past & Present* 192 (2006): 63.

“simplicity and truth of mind.”⁸ Consequently, exoteric forms of religion are mutable and *do* depend on use: “Something intended to promote the practice of piety and religion is called sacred and divine and is sacred only so long as people use it religiously.”⁹ Thus the exoteric forms of religious practice essentially will be fictions designed to represent this inward moral order to the greatest number of people possible.¹⁰ As some have recognized, though, this kind of argument actually places a lot of weight on the exoteric rituals of a given society as a means for attaining knowledge about that society. Religion is both an internal rule answerable to the universal moral norm and at the same time a set of practices defined by the cultural horizons of a certain time and place.¹¹

But one can find this explosive idea latent in much of the anxiety about the boundaries of false religion in the Reformed tradition in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, localized in discussions of the fictions of pagan religion and myth. Indeed, mythic fiction can provide a lens with which to view developments in Renaissance conceptions of religion; and vice versa, that changes in religion were also dependent on changing conceptions of the fictions and symbolism structuring religious rituals. This is where scholars might most fruitfully study the interconnections and intersections between religion and literature: the generative, destabilizing energy of literary fictions and their generic

⁸ Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. Jonathan Israel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 169 and 116.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁰ For the idea that religion increasingly moved inward during the early modern period, producing an ever greater divide between intellectual and popular accounts of religion, see especially Peter Harrison, *“Religion” and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Peter Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism* (London: Routledge, 1989); Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, rev. ed. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1994); and John Bossy, “Some Elementary Forms of Durkheim,” *Past & Present* 95 (1982): 3–18.

¹¹ For a critique of the “interiority thesis,” see Sheehan, “Sacred and Profane,” 63–65.

complexity can help us uncover similar realignments in the religious reinterpretation of pagan myths and cultures.

This is an important problem, because for literary scholars “pagan” and “classical” have long been shibboleths for secularism and the process of secularization, itself a highly problematic concept with potentially multiple points of origin in the early modern period.¹² The terms for this identification were developed by Jacob Burckhardt, and kept alive by later critics as William Elton, Gordon Teskey, and Richard Strier. Elton’s *King Lear and the Gods* is the classic work of the pagan/secular identification: the play’s universe, its natural imagery and natural philosophy, showed Elton that the “pagan” setting privileges the interplay of classical philosophies that Peter Gay had identified as the basis of the Enlightenment.¹³ With a similar critical horizon, Richard Strier’s *The Unrepentant Renaissance* is otherwise an excellent collection of close readings, happily attempting to refute modern critics who emphasize a kind of New Historicist pessimism about the potency of Renaissance individualism. But we encounter passages repeating the problematic pagan/secular equation, claiming, for example, “Seneca’s *De Beneficiis* as the primary classical (secular) source for Shakespeare’s commitment to ‘the virtue of giving.’”¹⁴ The book celebrates the triumph of secularism as a “revolution,” rooted in “a conception of life in the world as compatible with, even constituting, the highest form of spiritual life.” And so, to “deny ‘utterly’ the medieval

¹² See Jonathan Sheehan, “Enlightenment, Religion, and the Enigma of Secularization: A Review Essay,” *The American Historical Review* 108 (2003): 1061–1080; and Niklaus Largier, “Mysticism, Modernity, and the Invention of Aesthetic Experience,” *Representations* 105, no. 1 (2009): 37–60.

¹³ For a similar reading of paganism and natural theology in the sixteenth century, see Alan Sinfield, “Sidney, Du Plessis–Mornay, and the Pagans,” *Philological Quarterly* 58 (1979): 26–39.

¹⁴ Strier, *The Unrepentant Renaissance: From Petrarch to Shakespeare to Milton* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 20n48.

distinction between religion and secular life is to make (or participate in) this revolution.”¹⁵

This way of thinking about the Reformation as a secularist movement is only half right, though. It is more useful to view the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as periods in which the relationship between the religious and the secular was continually being redefined and readjusted. For example, it is equally useful to look for the kinds of individualism that Strier values in Reformation critiques of religion as well as in the space opened up by the debates of religious symbolism and political belonging that accompanied the scholarship, poetry, and polemic of false religion.

It need not be difficult to place the discourse of pagan myth and literature within what has been described by Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti as a “turn to religion” among literary critics.¹⁶ This body of criticism nominally eschews the hermeneutics of suspicion, the role assumed by the critic of unmasking religions and reducing them to their poetic or political elements. As Jackson and Marotti see it, the new favored critical stance toward religion is a cautious acceptance of the terms of early modern religion itself, which can produce expansive readings of the social, political, and individual consequences of early modern religion without reducing belief to illusion. But too often critics are caught up in the polemical arguments of the confessional divide, which characterized differing forms of Christian religion as poetic fables, false religion masquerading as the true religion of ancient Christianity. A study of pagan religion can help to fill in the space that Jackson and Marotti describe, a space between acknowledging religion as false and accepting others’ beliefs as valid. Pagan religion was obviously “false” for early modern Christians, and so a study of its terms actually provided early moderns with the language with which to speak of the common

¹⁵ Ibid., 14.

¹⁶ Jackson and Marotti, “The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies,” *Criticism* 46 (2004): 167–90.

origin of all religions outside of confessional strife; pagan myths were especially good at encouraging reflection on the symbolic structure of religious signification, and its civil implications. Pagan religion and myth thus formed a generative, rather than only a polemical, error for early moderns, which is why it can help us to see new forms of religious expression outside of the familiar Enlightenment dichotomy of reason and unreason, or between “defamiliarizing experiences and familiar knowledge.”¹⁷ To dwell on pagan religion as an error—as a universally acknowledged fictional religion—and to view its languages and stories as a free space, which opens up new realms of religious affiliation, political rearrangement, social belonging, and natural knowledge, is the goal of my dissertation. After all, the idea of a “pagan renewal” has long structured both scholarly and popular understandings of what the Renaissance *means*, what it was all about. The space between popular literary genres and stories and the “false religion” underlying them is the space of my project.

My chapters thus seek out moments of exchange between literary and religious modes of thinking about pagan religion and myth, and bring them into dialogue. My first chapter, on Arthur Golding’s translation of Ovid and his translations of Calvin, re-imagines Golding’s prefaces as strategies for assimilating Ovid’s paganism. At the same time that he translates Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, he is also deeply engaged with some of Calvin’s most interesting polemics and commentaries, and heavily invested in understanding the world of the early Christians. The idea of the early Christian world, when pagans and Christians mixed and mingled, shows up in Golding’s scriptural referents in his prefaces. Perhaps most importantly, his long discursus on Titus 1:15, “to the pure all things are pure,” shows Golding’s argument that to confront false religion is a bodily, physical endeavor. The fictions

¹⁷ Ibid., 182.

of Ovid's myths are physical, certainly, but Golding's interpretive method emphasizes the need to recognize a fundamental material similarity between Christians and pagans as the basis for reading the products of another religion. And as Golding's forays into the vestiarian controversy and the religious transformations of the Elizabethan church under Cecil demonstrate, the history of Christian encounters with paganism provided the baseline of argument for important questions of ecclesiastical organization and the political consequences of confronting false religion.

My second chapter moves from hermeneutics to debates over pagan rituals and their place in the Christian church. Richard Hooker, Christopher Marlowe, and William Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* appropriate pagan religious customs to argue for the place of religion within politics and society. The line between the "secular" and the "religious" is rarely more tenuous for these writers; and as they weave their representations and arguments about pagan religions, they are also defining the place of religious fictions in their society and in their own works. Paganism, read as a fictional, human creation, gives these artists and thinkers a free space to construct alternative versions of religious politics outside of the actual. But, what I find remarkable and worth revisiting in these writers is the fact that pagan religion and its myths remain in the boundaries of religion itself: they are not coterminous with the secular. Rather, they provide evidence of the complex discourses of political religion and religious fiction in the late sixteenth century.

My third chapter reconsiders John Milton's early poetry in the light of arguments about religious space, which became the basis for debates about the meaning of the sacred: whether it was created by practice and ritual or whether it was an immutable concept. Milton's 1645 poems, filled with images of memorials, monuments, sacred groves, tree

nymphs, and genii, provides a surprisingly rich body of material to chart the progress of false religion in the 1630s. Milton's early poetry especially was marked by an ambivalence over the materials of worship that he resolved later on in his epics and prose.¹⁸ I read Milton's early poetry as self-consciously reflecting on the potential within pagan fictions to remake the ritualistic foundations of political and social relationships; the mendacious rituals of Comus, for example, demonstrate by negative example that the sacred must be created out of the materials of the profane. This impulse in Milton, itself a brief moment in his poetic and intellectual career, shows how a powerful imagination could access the scholarly revisions of mythographic symbolism and harness them to redefine the relationship between the sacred and the profane.

I find a similar willingness to explore and experiment with the boundaries of religion in the poetry of Robert Herrick, the subject of my fourth and final chapter. I argue that Herrick's *Hesperides* is torn between two conflicting poles of religious culture. As a post-Laudian poet, Herrick often feels the need to expand the horizons of the sacred into the realms of the personal and the social, to suggest that pagan and Christian forms might find common ground in their practice in everyday life. However, he also feels compelled to limit the sacred, whittling and refining it down to its smallest forms. Hence his obsession with "little" things, and the way that devotional objects tend to shrink and diminish in his poetic voice. I argue that, far from a diminution of the power of religion, these small forms revitalize religion by shifting its force into the realm of the symbolic. Thus, the exoteric expansion of mixed rituals in some of his poetry is ultimately subordinated to the esotericism of the intricate symbol or the puppet, the efficacious object that takes the place of the human or the living within religious rituals. This refinement of religion contributes to other,

¹⁸ Daniel Shore expands on this idea in his "Why Milton is Not an Iconoclast," *PMLA* 127 (2012): 22–37.

contemporary revisions of the place of religious symbolism within political and social structures. The power of Herrick's fictions opens up a vista onto an ancient religion suddenly made new again in its symbolic economy, a model perhaps for a religious polity torn by very real, violent sacrifices.

In a way, my project forms a revision of the prehistory of comparative religion. Instead of seeing the roots of Vico's social history of religion in the scientific criticism that produced powerful distinctions of true and false, I locate the generative, fictive force of false religion as the genesis of a renewed symbolist streak in religious thought. In this way my project represents a call to attend to the areas where religion and its explanatory power becomes contingent, in its interactions with poetry, legal thought, and political identity. And as I will go on to argue, we can look to the polemical battles of the early church to provide a lens with which to view the interrelations between the poetic force of received traditions and eternally mutable forms, and the civil representations of political power, whether in the sovereign, the people, or the dead. This way of reading pagan literature in the Renaissance both reduces and privileges the place of natural knowledge: naturalism is no longer the only source of the secular, but the transformations of natural objects legitimated the newly ascendant religion of representations that we find in the seventeenth century. This project revises narratives of secularization and the place of the "pagan renewal" in the Renaissance, finding in literary fictions an analogue and finally a source for the complexity of modern debates about religious history.

I. The Antiquarian Varro and his Three Theologies

Renaissance its ideas about pagan religion have their origins in the ancient world, especially the period of late antiquity when pagans and Christians co-existed in the same society.

Indeed, the interaction between Christian and pagan religions in late antiquity provided the basis for many enduring religious distinctions in the Renaissance. And indeed there is one figure who looms larger than others in Renaissance understanding of pagan religion, namely the Roman antiquarian Marcus Terentius Varro. His idea of a tripartite theology was very influential in the Renaissance, an idea that we know almost wholly from St. Augustine's discussion of it in his *City of God Against the Pagans*. Augustine's book cemented many enduring distinctions between the new religion and traditional forms of paganism that he excoriates. The heart of Augustine's critique of the operation of paganism comes in several key chapters in book 6, where he adduces the Roman historian Varro's analysis of pagan theology. These passages are, I believe, central to an understanding the early modern reception of pagan religion: they set the terms of debate that would set the standard for centuries of thinking on the subject of religion's relationship both to art and to the state. A careful consideration of them is compulsory for a study examining the origins of the modern and early modern transpositions of religion, art, politics, and culture.

It is easy to miss just how important these chapters are for Augustine's larger narrative and argument. Varro's work represented the very heart of intellectual paganism for Augustine; it seems to have been a work that attempted a grand synthesis of the various forces that the pagan world venerated and incorporated into its religious, political, and social institutions. Augustine chooses the very strongest point of Varro's to attack however: the idea that pagan religion united poetic, natural, and civil understandings of both the divine and the human. Augustine portrays Varro and his scholarship in generally glowing terms, and he

seems genuinely to revere Varro. His presentation of Varro's ideas is of course skewed to Augustine's perspective, but there is little reason to think that Augustine is using Varro as a straw man.

As Augustine notes, when Varro produced his analysis of pagan religion he was writing a history of religious rituals and how those rituals mediated responses to the divine. This is why, according to Augustine, he gave precedence to human things: says Varro, "Just as the painter exists before the picture and the builder before the building, so do cities precede the things instituted by cities."¹⁹ This turns out to be good metaphor for what Varro thinks of religion, as Augustine goes on to relate. In the next chapter he introduces Varro's three kinds of theology, or "accounts given of the gods": "Of these, he calls one mythical, another physical, and the third civil" (246). Varro privileges the second kind as that of the philosophers, but removes it from popular consideration. The natural allegory of the Greek philosophers cannot be readily understood and so cannot function as a socially and politically cohesive force. So, in Augustine's formulation, Varro makes an alliance between the first and third kinds of theology, between the "mythic" theology of the poets and the "civil" theology of the urban politicians. Augustine seizes on this and expands on what he views as a natural association of the arts of the theater and of poetry with the arts of civil religion. Both kinds of art are essentially performative. Poets encourage belief in the gods through theatrical performances, while priests, according to Varro, administer "the knowledge of which gods are to be worshipped publicly," and they relate "what rites and sacrifices are appropriate to each" (248). And "where is the theatre," Augustine asks, "if not in the city?" (249).

¹⁹ Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 245 (6.4); I will cite this edition in the text by page number.

Poetry and religious rituals are inextricably bound up with the manipulation of the people, Augustine argues: “[B]oth poets and priests are so united with one another in a fellowship of falsehood” (249–50). At this point, we are forced to accept Augustine’s description of how Varro’s three theologies work together. Augustine also reports Varro’s attempt to yoke the three types of theologies together. He quotes Varro as saying that the three theologies “differ in such a way that not a few elements of both of them have been adopted into the civil theology. We shall, then, describe what the civil theology has in common with each of the others, as well as what is peculiar to itself; but we must keep company more with the philosophers than with the poets” (251). But Augustine never lets us see how Varro would link the civil and natural theologies. Rather, he argues that Varro wanted to condemn the civil theology but could not, because he was constrained by expectations of his audience. According to Augustine, Varro wanted to demonstrate the similarities between “the city” and the “the theatre” in order to “prepare a place in men’s minds for the natural theology” (260). But, says Augustine, “Varro was “afraid to speak out against the most vicious beliefs of the people” (249). So, evidently it was not Varro’s argument that the mythical and civil theologies are both based on malicious and misleading fictions, but that is certainly what Augustine argues and is what became one of the intellectual legacies of his book.

Yet we do get glimmerings of how Varro would have understood the natural theology to work together with the others. It seems that Varro found the origins of civil rites in the efforts of the first philosophers to reveal the truths of nature through representations. Augustine tells us that “Varro commends these naturalistic explanations so highly as to say that the men of old invented the images, attributes and adornments of the gods precisely so

that, when those had approached the mysteries of the doctrine had seen these visible things with their eyes, they might also see with their mind the soul of the world and its parts” (274). This invention of images would also seem to be the basis for the creation of religious worship among the Romans. Augustine does say a bit later that he will turn to the question of “whether he has been able in that book to bring this natural theology into agreement with the civil theology” (275). This could indicate that it was Varro’s intent to try to bring the two into line. But Augustine is quick to argue that even if Varro could show a basis in nature for the civil religion, it would not matter because “not even the natural theology which gives him so much pleasure is true” (ibid.). The key to Varro’s system seems, and we cannot be sure, to be rooted in the natural origins of religious representation. As Varro argued, the ancients had created a system of representation so that natural truths could be understood: an image leads its viewer from itself to an idea about nature and divinity that it presents to the viewer. These various representations create divisions, because one thing (a natural phenomenon) thus comes to be worshipped via a metaphorical symbol or image. This, at least, is what Augustine attacks when he notes that on the face of it a god like “Tellus” (the earth) should be whole unto itself, and yet we find Tellus divided into Orcus and Proserpina. In turn, they are “worshipped as three with their own altars, their own shrines, their own rites, images and priests” (295–96). This provenance of religious rituals is at least a coherent account of how Varro might have untied the natural and the civil theologies, even though Augustine’s commentary is paramount.

Augustine gives us even more hints about how Varro might have constructed his history of pagan religious worship. Varro was inclined, Augustine wrote, to look for linguistic origins of the various gods. Augustine quotes him as saying that “Tellus is Ops,

because is improved by work [*opus*]; Mother, because she gives birth to many things; Great, because gives birth to food; Proserpine, because fruits creep forth [*proserpant*] from her” (297). This was a common move in Stoic etymologies, to attempt to find historical origins for the gods in the first human utterances.²⁰ There is thus a fundamental truth to be found in the names of gods, and this truth is also linked to the ideas about nature set up by the first philosophers. But just as those philosophers create images and divide natural objects into representations, so does language divide and develop into many different forms. Varro explains this phenomenon by arguing that “it is possible . . . for the same thing to be one, yet to have many things contained in it” (ibid.). But this multiplication of divinity was what Augustine wanted to attack. So he argues that Varro had “misgivings” about what Augustine calls “the authority of his mistaken forebears” (ibid.). For Augustine, then, pagan religion is defined from the outset by the creation of a symbolic mode of worship that used representations to signify religious truths. But, he argues, these representations spin out of control, dividing and ramifying into many gods to the point that the original god is lost in the sea of names and images. But Varro himself seems to have defended this system by arguing that any civilly functioning religious system will have to rely on myths accommodated to the people, but that there is still a way to find the truth at the bottom of the religious traditions that the Romans have inherited.

From what Augustine has given us, then, we can venture a description of what Varro’s threefold system of theology was designed to do. For Varro, Romans needed all three types of theology in order to have a functioning religious state. For an institutionalized civil religion to function, it needs both an element of representation and an element of natural

²⁰ See James Allen, “The Stoics on the Origin of Language and the Foundations of Etymology,” in *Language and Learning: Philosophy of Language in the Hellenistic Age*, ed. Dorothea Frede (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 14–15.

philosophy. This is why Varro dismisses the poetic fables as “false” but does not banish them from civil society. By juxtaposing mythic theology with natural theology, Varro creates an indeterminate realm of what we would think of as culture, in which representations of socially significant acts are performed in a realm in which the facts of history are both affirmed as true in time and symbolized by beings outside the strict limits of chronology. Varro’s civil religion is designed to support the contingent acts of a polytheistic society, in which widespread, popular cults coexisted with local cults of hearth and home. Varro seems to have been making a concession to the modern civil religion that relied on images and representations by arguing that even the first natural philosophers thought one *could* attain wisdom through images. But he also seems to imply that such images should be unnecessary for the philosopher. In any case, just what Varro believed is unclear because Augustine has not given us enough information. It remains perfectly clear, though, that Augustine is critiquing Varro’s symbolic economy of representation, allegory, and ritual; he argues that if Varro wants to create a civil religion that is based on representations, then he will create a system of worship that is utterly fictional. What is more, Augustine says that Varro’s civil religion does not work because it creates a distinction between the learned, who possess the truth about nature, and the masses who merely follow the ridiculous representations of the poets and legislators. And, what is worse, Augustine thought that this system founders on Varro’s own misgivings about the internal divisions of popular knowledge and action.

In fact, Varro and Augustine were both struggling with the dilemma of popular religion. The fact that the poetic myths are “false” is Augustine’s biggest problem with this system; it leads the wise pagans, such as Annaeus Seneca, to reject the “rites of civil theology” in his “private religion while feigning respect for them in his actions” (263). Yet,

Augustine has to grapple just the same with the idea that one's religious beliefs will never perfectly match the external circumstances of the social and political worlds. He ends up with the famous formulation of the members of the heavenly city as "pilgrims" in the earthly city:

Therefore, for as long as this Heavenly City is a pilgrim on earth, she summons citizens of all nations and every tongue, and brings together a society of pilgrims in which no attention is paid to any differences in the customs, laws, and institutions by which earthly peace is achieved or maintained. She does not rescind or destroy these things, however. For whatever differences there are among the various nations, these all tend towards the same end of earthly peace. Thus, she preserves and follows them, provided only that they do not impede the religion by which we are taught that the one supreme and true God is to be worshipped. (946–47)

The difference between Augustine's pilgrim and the disaffected Seneca is subtle but important. Augustine's pilgrims are united in their own society of the heavenly city, "since the city's life is inevitably a social one" (947). On the other hand, Seneca's society demands the assumption of a certain symbolic economy between fiction, nature, and civic ritual. What would be "culture" for Augustine would be either indifferent to salvation or at worst inimical to it, whereas "culture" for Varro and even Seneca is the symbolic, representative system that reinforces belief and feeds back into the economy of civil, religious life.

Paganism, Art, and Social Control in the Reformation

One way to examine the continuing influence of Varro's theology, especially his civil theology, is to examine two of his most astute students, Niccolo Machiavelli and John Calvin. Machiavelli never cites Varro, but he was one of the great proponents of the civil religion that Varro defended and Augustine derided. Machiavelli's treatment occurs during his discussion of Numa Pompilius, ancient Rome's second king, who introduced religious rituals and brought peace to the bellicose Romans. Numa had been, and continued to be, a

loadstone for the idea of civil religion, inviting both supporters and detractors.²¹ Augustine, in a strategy that became common, associated Numa's religion with demons, magical hydromancy, and madness (*City of God*, pp. 310–11). For others including Machiavelli, however, Numa was the epitome of a cunning ruler. “[Numa] turned to religion as something absolutely necessary for maintaining a civilized society.”²² Religion, indeed, proved to be quite “useful” to Rome, “in controlling the armies, in giving courage to the plebeians, in keeping men good, and in shaming the wicked” (51). Machiavelli interprets Numa's hydromancy as a shrewd trick: the king “pretended to have a close relationship with a nymph who advised him about how he should advise the people.” He did this because “he doubted that his own authority was sufficient” (51–52). This form of persuasion works best among uncivilized people, Machiavelli writes, employing an artistic conceit: “a sculptor will more easily extract a beautiful statue from a rough piece of marble than he can from one badly blocked out by others” (52). Machiavelli's appreciation of the pagan civil religion stems from its manipulation of belief among the credulous, but also the way that this religion uses the basic propensity for religious devotion and belief among the people.²³

Indeed, the crux of this religion is the way that the political elites support the foundations, arbitrary though they may be. In Machiavelli's estimation, the fall of pagan religion began when its oracles began to sound too political:

Later, as these oracles began to speak in a way similar to that of the powerful and their falsity was discovered by the peoples, men became disbelievers and capable of undermining every good institution. The rulers of a republic or a

²¹ See Mark Silk, “Numa Pompilius and the Idea of Civil Religion in the West,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72 (2004): 863–96.

²² Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 50. Further references appear in the text.

²³ See J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 202.

kingdom must, therefore, uphold the foundations of the religion they profess; and having done this, they will find it an easy matter for them to maintain a devout republic and, as a consequence, one that is good and united. They must also encourage and support all those things that arise in favour of this religion, even those they judge to be false, and the more they have to do so, the more prudent they are and the more knowledgeable about natural phenomena. Because this method has been followed by wise men, there has arisen a belief in miracles that are celebrated even by false religions; thus, prudent men magnify their importance, no matter the principle from which they originate, and through the authority of these miracles they gain everyone's confidence. (54)

The manipulation of belief thus proceeds through an encouragement of tradition and the natural foundations of "miraculous" phenomena. Thus the rulers are guarded from cynicism by revering tradition and the populace reaps the benefits of unity. (Such a solution was familiar not only from Varro but also from Cicero, whose *De Divinatione* explicitly recommended such a middle way between elite skepticism and popular belief, or disbelief.²⁴) Machiavelli boldly criticizes the dominant Christian institutions of his day for avoiding this pagan solution to the problem of religion, arguing that the pagan model of civil religion is more conducive to unity and strength. He is unambiguous: "If this kind of religion had been maintained by the clergy of Christian republics just as it had been instituted by its founder, Christian states and Christian republics would be more united and more happy than they are now" (ibid.). The basis for this unity in pagan religion was "the integrity of their religious ceremonies . . . because the life of every religion has its foundations in one of its principal institutions" (53). Cultic practices, "divine worship," were the basis of Machiavelli's civil religion, much as they were for Varro. Machiavelli recuperates the mimetic, representational importance of worship that Varro had emphasized, especially the symbiotic relationship

²⁴ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, ed. and trans. W. A. Falconer, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923), 451 (2.70); see also Brian A. Krostenko, "Beyond (Dis)belief: Rhetorical Form and Religious Symbol in Cicero's *de Divinatione*," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 130 (2000): 376–78.

between natural phenomena and the corroborating evidence of belief found in idols and the public approbation thereof. He cites approvingly the case of the sacking of Veii, when Roman soldiers entered the temple of Juno and asked the idol if it wanted to come to Rome. Some soldiers thought they saw the statue nod approval, and “their opinion and credulity was strongly encouraged and supported by Camillus and the other rulers of the city” (54). The combination of popular belief, natural phenomena, artistic representations, and the support of political leaders is the essence of Varro’s theology.

The terms of Machiavelli’s extraordinary arguments, if not their conclusions, were part of a widespread reforming impulse in the early sixteenth century. Once again, pagan religions form the unstated background context. On this count, John Calvin’s similarities with Machiavelli run deeper than might be expected. His *Institution of Christian Religion* begins by accepting the terms, but criticizing the argument, of Machiavelli’s and Varro’s theology. One of the foundations of Calvin’s own theology was the idea that the need for religious devotion of some kind is universal. He argues that “it is most vaine which some doe saye, that religion was devised by the sotteltie and craft of a few, by this policie to kepe the simple people in awe.”²⁵ He continues, “I graunt indede that sottle men have invented many thinges in religion, whereby to bring the people to a reverence, and cast them in a feare, to make their mindes the more pliable to obedience: but this they coulde never have brought to passe unlesse the mindes of men had been already before hand perswaded that there was a God, out of which persuasion as out of sede springeth that ready inclinacion to religion” (fol. 4r). Calvin acknowledges, of course, that the common people are easily manipulated, as Machiavelli noted, by the inborn desire to worship God and adhere to religious institutions.

²⁵ Calvin, *Institution of Christian Religion*, trans. Thomas Norton (London, 1561), fol. 4r. Subsequent citations will appear in the text.

And as in Machiavelli's writings, the basis for this devotion is, at least partially, natural knowledge as confirmed by the senses: "for asmuch as the unlearned people yea and the rudest sort of them, such as ar furnished with the only helpe of their eyes, can not be ignoraunt of the excellencie of gods conning workmanship" (fol. 6v). Calvin's natural theology was largely unremarkable, a collection of scholastic commonplaces, though it is characterized by more than a little anxiety about how nature might be used to manipulate the people and reinforce credulity. This was the case because Calvin could not be sure how or what natural phenomena could teach humans about god: it confirmed his existence but provided little definite knowledge.

Thus Calvin's thought tended toward the utilitarianism of Machiavelli when it came to religion and politics, but with a crucial difference. As William Bouwsma argues, "One of the worst abominations of classical antiquity, Calvin thought, had been the cynical exploitation of religion by rulers for purposes of social control."²⁶ The elites merely faked their religious beliefs, meanwhile withholding what they thought to be the truth. This is of course Varro's theology, which Calvin saw replicating itself across Europe as "suttle men" feigned their religion all over again. This anxiety manifested itself, much as Varro's had, in an uneasiness with the way that natural objects, which otherwise transmit knowledge about God's existence, can be turned into tools for mass manipulation. Calvin even cites Varro's condemnation of the use of images in worship (fol. 24v). "It is a foolish fained invencion," he writes, "whatsoever we conceive of our own sense concerning God" (fol. 23v). Varro himself thought, as Augustine has it in *The City of God*, that "the people on the whole" are "more inclined to follow the poets than the natural philosophers." And this is partially because "supposedly prudent and wise men made it their business to deceive the people in

²⁶ Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 204.

matters of religion” (184). Natural knowledge for Varro was to be kept from the vulgar because its truths were too distant from experience; however, for Calvin natural knowledge itself proved God’s existence but its manipulation for civil or artistic persuasion was abhorrent. Similarly, the crucial distinction between reformed Christianity and paganism, and the “parapolytheism”²⁷ of contemporary lay devotion, is the distrust of the products of human art no matter how they are put to the service of civil society. Part of Calvin’s purpose in these opening pages of his *Institutes* is to deal with the problems that come from humanity’s inborn desire to worship, a desire easily manipulated especially among the “vulgar.” Calvin was certainly thinking through the same issues as Machiavelli was, and using some of the same terms, though Calvin came to radically different conclusions.

Calvin’s next lengthy excursus is on idolatry, and there he acknowledges that the desire to manipulate natural objects and to set them up as divine substitutes has long been taught by custom. But this kind of representation of God divides his will from his creation:

for that there is nothyng lesse conuenient than to bryng God to the measure of fyue fote which is aboue all measure and incomprehensyble. And yet thys same monstrous thyng which manifestly repugneth agaynste the order of nature, custome sheweth to be naturall to men. We must moreover holde in minde, that superstitions are in Scripture commonly rebuked in thys phrase of speache, that they are ye workes of mens hande which want the authoritie of God: that thys may be certayne, that all these maners of worshipping that men do deuise of them selues are detestable. The Prophete in the Psalme doeth amplife the madnesse of them that therfore are endued wyth vnderstandyng, that they shoulde know that al thynges are moued with the only power of God, and yet they pray for helpe to thinges dead and senselesse. But because the corruption of nature carryeth as wel al nacions, as eche man priuatlye to so great madnesse, at last the holy ghost thondreth wyth terryble curse agaynst them saying: let them that make them become lyke to them and so many as trust in them. And it is to be noted that a similitude is no lesse forbydden than a grauen image, wherby the fonde suddeltie of the Grekes is confuted. For they thynke they ar wel discharged if they graue not a God, while in payntinges they do more licentiously outrage than any other nations. But the Lord

²⁷ For this term, see Carlos M. N. Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 25.

forbyddeth an image not onely to be made by the grauer, but also to be counterfai't by any other workman, because such counterfai'ting is euill and to the dishonor of his maiestie. (fol. 24r)

The “sutteltie” of art is one of Calvin’s favorite ways to denigrate religious fiction for its divisive effects on religious worship. However, immediately after his condemnation of art he qualifies it, reclaiming at least the mimetic functions of art while worrying over the tendency of art to mislead: “And yet am I not so superstitious that I thinke no images maye be suffred at al. But forasmuch as caruing and painting are the giftes of God, I require that they both be purely and lawfully vsed. . . . It remayneth therefore lawfull that onelye those thynges bee painted and grauen whereof our eies are capable: but that the maiestie of God which is far above the sense of our eies, be not abused with vncomly deuised shapes” (fol. 26v). Calvin had previously, and repeatedly, questioned the value of art and linked art to the debasing inventions of men applied to religion. The ancient philosophers especially are guilty of translating their views of nature into their divinity:

The Stoikes seemed in theyr owne conceipte to speake very wysely, that out of all the partes of nature may be gathered diuers names of God, and yet that God beyng but one is not therby torne in sonder. As though we were not already more than enough enclined to vanitie, vnlesse a manifolde plentie of gods set before vs should further and more violently drawe vs into errour. Also the Egyptians mysticall science of diuinitie sheweth, that they all diligently endeouored to this ende, not to seeme to erre without a reason. And it is possible, that at the fyrst syght some thyng semyng probable, might deceyue the symple and ignorant: but no mortall man euer inuented any thing, wherby religion hath not ben fowly corrupted. (fol. 10v)

Calvin struggles, just as Augustine did, to replace Varro’s triangulation of fabulous, natural, and civil theologies. Varro’s own system, which privileged natural theology, was derived from the Stoics, and solved the problem of popular access by granting some measure of natural legitimacy to the multitude of gods, which mirrored the quotidian, civil concerns of the multitude itself. One reason for Calvin’s struggle to reorient this system is that he never

decided on the value of natural knowledge in the same way that the Italian mystagogues did; he never identified a way to transmute the natural into allegorical representations of the divine. And so he ended up affirming a limited value for human arts, a mimetic but non-civil and non-symbolic use value.

Thus, the crucial mediating idea within the discourse of civil religion was the status of fiction and poetic making. The religious fiction of Machiavelli and the pagans he admired was a version of Plato's "noble lie," a religious truth created by the wise for the cause of unity. For Varro, the fictions of the poets abetted the fictions of the lawgiver, and this system held together because there was a natural legitimacy for multiple gods, even though the ultimate truths of this natural theology had to be hidden away. For Calvin on the other hand, religious fiction no longer had a basis in nature, which merely set the baseline for religious experience, the belief in God, but did not provide concrete truths. And so it made sense for Calvin to limit artistic expression to those things that corresponded directly to sensory impressions. Anything else verged too closely on a kind of civil religion in which legislators turned to poetry and representation for the religious approbation of social and civil policy.

Mythography, Media, and Religion as Culture

For students of the Renaissance reception of pagan myths and religion, there is no getting around the fact that in this period pagan religions were thought, and believed, to be completely false. If understood on their own terms rather than syncretically, pagan religions and their gods were almost universally thought to be fictional, created by man, and put to the purpose of misleading the people; they were absurd and ridiculous, and to study them in depth was constantly to be reminded that man creates fictions in the service of religion. And

yet, there were ways that this body of religious fiction could be put to the use of Christian theology and artistic representation. Mythographers looked for ways to find the kernel of hidden truth in the body of lies, to identify the one principle that formed the basis of the pagan religions, but from which the pagans deviated. Lilio Gregorio Giraldi's scholarly mythography, *De Deis Gentium Varia & Multiplex Historia* (1548) takes etymology as its principle of differentiation, but Giraldi remains just as vexed by the problem of pagan natural theology and religious fiction as his predecessors. Giraldi proposes that the names of the gods derive from those things common to all in nature or daily life. But he finds unity in the idea that all peoples express the name of God with four letters. This is all fairly straightforward; the difficulty arises when one starts to investigate how the pagans' system of religious representation functioned. Essentially, Giraldi, argues, this process is a kind of cultural history, or ethnography; it takes into account rituals, laws, ceremonies, names, and symbols. It slowly starts to dawn on the reader that when Giraldi talks about pagan religion he is really talking about *all* religions. And so Giraldi at the beginning of his work dwells on how religions are created out of what is common to all:

Sed uti Sol, Luna, Coelum, Terra, Mare, communia sunt omnibus, licet et aliis apud alios nominibus appellentur: ita eadem ratione unus est Deus, cuius ubique vis est & providentia, omnia alit, sustinet, exornat: alii tamen apud alios sunt ritus legibus instituti, aliae caerimoniae, alia nomina, alia symbola, obscure quidem e primis auctoribus condita & consecrata, uni tamen supremo & praepotenti quae aptari & convenire debent, quorum omnium interpretationem & explicationem non facile, nec sine periculo quilibet disquirere, vel praesumere potest.²⁸

[But just as the sun, moon, sky, land, and sea are common to all, it makes sense that among different peoples they are called by different names. Thus by the same rationale there is one God, whose strength and providence nourishes, sustains, and enlivens all things. Nevertheless there are various rituals set up by laws among various peoples, and various ceremonies, names, and symbols.

²⁸ Giraldi, *De Deis Gentium Varia & Multiplex Historia* (Basel, 1548), 2 (my translation follows). Further references will appear in the text.

Those things that ought to be accommodated to the one supreme and all-powerful being were obscurely set up and consecrated by their first authors; and whoever is able to venture an interpretation and explication of such things does so not easily, nor without danger.]

The danger of such work is to remain convinced of one's own method of distinguishing true from false, given the common source of religious traditions. The absurdity and errors of pagan religions might easily drift into the realm of Christian experience.

Giraldi dutifully rehearses Varro's threefold theology (p. 18), and especially focuses on the problems of the natural theology. All religious imagery, he argues, takes its force from deformations of natural objects. But this deformation can lead to greater understanding among the wise, if rightly interpreted. Religious fiction works, Giraldi says, by means of the idea of the container and contained. A vase contains wine, which signifies Bacchus; similarly, a human form contains a rational mind, just as the world contains a rational soul:

Videtis ne igitur, ut a physicis rebus bene atque utiliter inventis, ratio sit tracta ad commenticios & fictos deos, quae res genuit falsas opiniones, erroresque turbulentas, & superstitiones pene aniles. Et formae enim deorum nobis, & aetates, & vestes, & ornatus noti sunt: & cetera quae subiungit. Quin etiam Varro, Antiquos ait simulacra deorum & insignia ornatusque finxisse, quae cum oculis animadvertissent hi qui adiissent doctrinae mysteria, possent animam mundi ac partes eius, id est deos veros animo videre: quorum qui simulachra specie hominis fecerunt, hoc videri secutos, quod mortalium animus, qui est in corpore humano, similis est immortalis animi, tanquam si vasa ponerentur causa notandorum deorum, & in Liberi aedem oenophorum sisteretur, quod significaret vinum, per id quod continet id quod continetur: ita per simulachrum, quod formam haberet humanam, significari animam rationale, eo quod velut vase natura ista soleat contineri, cuius naturae Deum volebant esse, vel deos. haec ex Varrone. (p. 19)

[As Augustine writes: don't you see, then, that explanation is withdrawn from natural things that have been found to be useful, and pulled toward deceitful and fictive gods, which generates false opinions and disruptive errors, along with foolish superstitions verging on old wives' tales. Indeed the forms of the gods, along with their ages, clothing, and accoutrements are well known to us (and these things Augustine then subjoins to his work). Later on in Augustine's work, Varro said that the ancients made simulacra, symbols, and images of the gods, so that those who wished to learn about the mysteries

could use them to look upon, that they might be able to see, with their mind, the soul of the world and its parts, which is to say the true gods. And so the ancients made images of the gods in human form, because they were anxious that the mind of men, which is in the human body, be seen as similar to the immortal soul, just as if a dish might be used to represent the gods; or if a wine vessel was placed in the temple of Bacchus, which might signify wine, the container signifying that which is contained. Thus through a simulacrum that has a human form they wanted to signify the rational soul, just as they wished God, or the gods, to be of the same nature as that which is contained in a dish. Thus argues Varro.]

This passage is taken almost wholly from Augustine, who was rehearsing Varro's arguments about how the natural theology became expressed in the representations that formed the basis for the civil theology (cf. *City of God*, p. 274). Giraldi, perhaps like Augustine as well, seems to accept the rationale behind the creation of religious symbols from nature. However, and once again, the problem becomes that if one assumes a common principle of symbolic function among different religions, all differences begin to seem illusory. Giraldi seems to accept Varro's explanation of religious representation as universally valid, at least in terms of the distinction between how the "wise" and unwise approach these representations. But Giraldi never quite solves the problem of the "falsity" or "truth" of religious representation; rather he attempts to argue that the issue is really one of application. If images and representations, which derive from nature, are set up in places of worship and shown in public, among the people, then they are apt to be misused and misunderstood:

Atque adeo hinc est factum, ut mihi in Syntagmatibus his nonnihil laborandum sit, ut haec de deorum habitu & ornatu, picturaque antiquorum, figmenta patefacere, irridendi scilicet & exhibilandi causa: quanquam & vereor, ne & aliqui mihi (ut hoc nunc tempore permulti sunt, qui alio res transferunt, pie institutas) vitio vertant, tot divorum divarumque imagines, tot effigies, non in templis modo & sacrarum aedium parietibus parum honeste & sancte confictas, sed passim etiam locis publicis & profanis, & irreligiosis. At de istiusmodi magis mutire possumus, quam palam loqui. (p. 20)

[But certainly from here it came about, and as I have striven to show in my work, that these fictions of the ancients about the appearances, decorations,

and representations of the gods, were set up in order to be laughed at and mocked. Although I fear lest anyone (and in this time there are many who take things piously done and turn them to other uses) turn these things to ill, all these images of gods and goddesses, all these effigies, which were made and set up dishonestly and impiously not only in temples and within the walls of holy buildings, but also everywhere in places that were profane, irreligious, and open to the people. But about these things it is better to be silent than to speak openly.]

The real distinction that Giraldis is interested in is the one between the philosophers and the people, those who can understand images out of context. And even after rehearsing Varro's three theologies he remains ready to indict the pagans for vulgarizing religious representations, the way that the pagans set up idols and images not only in the temples but also in public places.

To rephrase the problem, Giraldis remains uneasy because he realizes that the natural theology cannot contain the impulse to create religious fictions, to create simulacra and images that represent social and civil ideas. Natural knowledge can be fictionalized and represented, and this is acceptable; but when memories of the dead, and virtuous people, are divinized then this is dangerous because it politicizes and humanizes religion through an artifice of utility:

Rudes ergo & simplices homines cum quosdam inter ipsos cernerent, qui magna & admiranda vel virtutum, vel caeterarum rerum praeclara facinora efficerent, illos ipsos plusquam homines, hoc est Deos putabant: vel ut fieri solet, interdum in admirationem praesentis potentiae ac fortunae, sive ob beneficia etiam quibus erant affecti, ac bene ad humanitatem compositi. Deinde cum reges ipsi his chari fuissent, quibus vitam composuissent, magnum sui desiderium mortui reliquerunt: unde & simulachra primum eorum finxerunt ad solatium. (p. 20)

[When the rude and simple people discerned some among them, who performed great and famous deeds full of virtue, they took these people to be more than human, that is to say gods. This came about through admiration of their evident power and fortune, or through the graces with which they were endowed, and which they brought to human kind. And so when these kings were beloved by those whose lives they provided for, their deaths left a great

longing for them; whence the people first made simulacra of them for their solace.]

Once again, the distinction between wisdom and the lack thereof serves as an explanation of the mistakes of ancient religion. But the distinction threatens to remove “religion” entirely from the considerations of the learned, a problem for Calvin as well and perhaps the entire Reformed tradition.²⁹ And while Giraldi acknowledges the recognition of “unknown gods” in antiquity, his focus remains on the exoteric, symbolic religion of the pagans. Still, Giraldi remains committed to what is essentially a modified Stoic solution to the problem of religious diversity. There is a primal unity, he thinks, and this unity justifies the investigation of the multitude of allegories and fictions produced out of it. But there is always the lurking sense that the fictions are dangerous, and indeed that all religion depends on artifice.

The fictive gods, the lies and artifice of the poets, sit among the mythographers like an unwelcome guest. They are to be banished, if possible. It was fiction itself that troubled all the mythographers, not just Giraldi. So it is not surprising that one of the most interesting, and anxious, treatments of myth in the sixteenth century is Vincenzo Cartari’s work on the images of the gods, *Le imagini de i Dei degli Antichi*, translated into English in 1599 as *The Fountaine of Ancient Fiction*. The ideal of this work is the religion without images, the kind of belief that does not require external support. In other words, the natural theology, which in Cartari’s work takes the form of an idealized, pre-civilized world in which simple tokens of devotion were prized over complex idols made of valuable metals. This original form of religion is thus a “natural religion.” What happens next, though, is that a kind of political

²⁹ For the argument that the Reformed tradition ultimately sees “religion” itself as an impediment to holiness, see Matthew Myer Boulton, *God Against Religion*: *Rethinking Christian Theology Through Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008). Marcel Gauchet sees all of the Christian tradition as encouraging this exit from religion, in his *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, trans. Oscar Burge (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

religion takes over very quickly from the natural religion. The belief that statues and images contain gods proves to be a repository for the desires of entire cities and peoples. And eventually that leads, argues Cartari, to the veneration of men who invented things helpful to human life. He doesn't mention Euhemerus, and in fact he seems more interested in how this kind of human-centered religion tended to perpetuate civic virtue. He comments:

“wherevpon *Eusebius* writing of the Ecclesiasticall historie, likewise writeth, That it was a generall custome among the Gentiles to honour the greatest personages, and men of best demerit, by representing their Ideas by Statues or Pictures, and so by that meanes keeping them as it were aliue by the memorious trophies of their neuer-dying worthinesse; wherby their succeeding posteritie might evidently perceiue what respectiue regard was had and cannonized of those who had in their life time adioined to their valerous approuements, ciuile and vertuous conuersation.”³⁰ This was indeed a “civil theology,” which joined with poetic fictions to promote a virtuous civil existence. Yet, this kind of civic unity is based on the mistake of seeing divinity in civil virtues, which turns these civil virtues into sources for lies and misrepresentations of divinity itself.

Furthermore, Cartari sees a link between the development of civil religion and the way that pagan societies viewed natural objects. Following Plato's original critique of the use of metals in religious objects, Cartari cites several ancient authors who argue for a kind of golden age of religion devotion, when gods were made from trees and plants rather than from iron and gold: “*Tibullus* speaking of their domesticall gods, whom they called Lares, thus sayth of them: Maruell not you foolish men to see these our gods made of stockes of drie trees, for such (sayeth hee) in the prosperous daies of our contentfull fathers, when religion, faith, and Iustice were sincerely and louingly embosom'd, were reuerenced with truer zeale of

³⁰ Cartari, *The Fountaine of Ancient Fiction*, trans. Richard Linche (London, 1599), sig. Biiiiv.

unfained veneration, than are now adays these gorgeous and gold-composed Statues” (sig. Ciir-v). In pagan image worship, Cartari sees two competing trends, one toward a kind of atavism and ancestor worship, which tends to maintain civic virtue through the statues and representations of heroes, and another that tended toward corruption, as the natural world was misappropriated and misinterpreted to reflect greater social sophistication. To investigate the symbolic economy of pagan myth was thus to encounter various narratives of the progress of religion, all centered around the way that pagan societies used fiction to prop up their religions.

In Cartari’s introduction we can see two broad categories of pagan religious fiction. There is the progressive aspect, the idea that we venerate the creators of useful things with our religious devotion. But there is also the perhaps more attractive myth of a golden age of primitive and pure devotion, in which nature was more connected to religious expression. The first kind tended to demystify religion: it suggested that people made their gods according to their various humors and cultural tendencies. Warlike people made warlike gods, etc. But the second kind saw in the development of religion in civilized cultures a malignant kind of blending and mixing of the religious and the civil, wherein the religious is harnessed by the few to control the many; or, where the base instincts for material gain influenced the nature of religion itself. Social and civil advancement became another name for religion.

This kind of equivalence is, to say the least, problematic for maintaining religious distinctions. Another way to state Cartari’s dilemma would be to say that religion becomes a term for what would later be called culture: the set of beliefs and artistic products that express the character of a people or nation. Cartari’s work shows the strength of the alliance

between artistic representation and a kind of civil religion. Cartari also shows very clearly how writers such as Plato debated the best way to turn nature into religious representations, and the appropriate way to express the nature of god within natural materials such as wood and stone. His work is intended as a pictorial history of how the natural theology has been accommodated to human intellect in the ancient system of representation. Cartari's is a work that meditates, perhaps dangerously, on the unstated and suppressed relationship between the poetic and civil theologies on the one hand, and the natural theology on the other. The danger that Giraldi worried about is exactly this: that natural objects would be taken from their secluded temples and made public and profane and thus a tool of social control by demagogues and scoundrels. Nature may have been God's art, but religion was increasingly the province of human art, a corruption of nature and an unredeemable morass of contradictory practices and beliefs that was more suited for controlling the masses than for gaining access to heaven. The development of a realm of "culture" out of religion depended on the increasing divide between an esoteric religion removed from the masses and the corruptions, errors, and fictions that showed up in the ritual practices of common people. But as Cartari showed his readers, these fictions could actually become, in the hands of skilled artists and writers, a self-legitimizing site for a new kind of "religious culture."

So far in my discussion of mythography I have been drawing attention to aspects of sixteenth-century thinking on pagan myth that are usually attributed only to seventeenth-century "scholarly" mythographers. And in fact, there is a shift of attention in the seventeenth century, away from the search for etymological or philosophical unity and toward the direction indicated by Cartari; that is, toward a view of pagan religions and symbols as art, but art that was socially and politically functional. My attention to these issues is not meant,

however, to deny that some scholars in the seventeenth century were trying to find ways to legitimate pagan religion and make it compatible with Christianity. Francis Bacon and Edward Herbert are prime examples of writers who investigate pagan mythology to find eternal allegorical, symbolic, and scientific truths. But the kind of scholarship I am discussing here also had a long history, developing from ideas that had been latent in the Varronian construction of pagan religion and thus known from Augustine, to Boccaccio, and through Giraldi and Cartari.

The scholarship of John Selden and G. J. Vossius, to take two prominent examples of scholars working on pagan religions, is both more careful than the sixteenth-century mythographies and more ambitious in seeking the origins of religion itself and its roots in the political and social life of communities. One of the reasons for this shift in emphasis is that Selden and Vossius were more attuned to the difference between exoteric and esoteric religions, especially to the ways in which the external trappings of religions—their rituals, practices, and symbols—derive from corruptions of natural knowledge to which the more intelligent philosophers are privy. In Selden's *De Diis Syris* (1617, rev. 1629), this distinction is manifest in the conceptual blurriness, among the pagans, between natural objects and the gods that they signified. The symbolic instability between a god and its representation caused the number of gods to multiply, hence the centrifugal nature of polytheistic worship and the division of nature into different gods with different rites. As Martin Mulrow argues, for Selden this understanding of the multiplicity of pagan religion as a mistake presumes the unity of natural knowledge among the educated elites of the ancient world. Selden refers constantly, Mulrow notes, to the differences in the sociology of knowledge (*wissenssoziologische*) between the common people and the most learned, the philosophers

and initiated priests.³¹ This notion of ancient religion as an exoteric corruption of an esoteric knowledge allowed Selden to make distinctions, to judge ancient religions based on how well they understood natural knowledge. And Mulsow concludes that this is where the seventeenth-century obsession with natural knowledge and natural history intersects with the history of religions. Vossius, he notes, would carry this project to its extremes, explaining all cultures in terms of their categorizations of animate and inanimate things, according to St. Paul's indictment of the multiplication of images of god among the pagans.³²

For Selden and Vossius both, the exoteric/esoteric divide allows them to make two crucial interpretive pivots. First, it allows them to create a framework that legitimates their minute and painstaking reconstructions of pagan religious practices; for if the origin of false religion lies in the true understanding of natural processes, one can judge what is true and what is false in any religion. But secondly, and more importantly, this interpretive method realigns the moral and spiritual valence of pagan rituals, practices, and symbols. As Selden is at pains to argue, there is a tremendous gulf between erudite and popular religion. This gulf makes it seem, however, that the exoteric pagan religions, based as they are on mistakes and errors, is not *evil* but merely *fictional*. By a natural human propensity toward abstraction and multiplicity, the unity of God that natural philosophy teaches becomes splintered, and the representations of the supreme being are taken to be divine. If the people could free themselves of the lure of the fictional, then they would recognize the absurdity of their religion and would admit the truth of the natural theology: “Neque simplicitatem cultus patienter turba tulisset, nec gravem Diis suis & inexpiabilem injuriam non fieri censuisset, si

³¹ Mulsow, “John Selden’s *De Diis Syris*: Idolatriekritik und Vergleichende Religionsgeschichte im 17. Jahrhundert,” *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 3 (2001): 16.

³² *Ibid.*, 23–24.

sphaeras illas, & reliqua prophetarum & antistium sacra, affaniarum accessione & ridiculis admirationis illecebris minus inquinata forte inspexerat” (the masses would not have suffered the simplicity of this kind of worship, and would have seen it as an untenable stain on its gods, if they could have looked upon the spheres and the sacred things of the prophets and forebears, only not so much polluted by the advent of trifling talk and by the laughable enticements of unthinking wonder).³³ In fact, both Vossius and Selden were worried by the evidence of the spread of idolatry into a civil force for control of the many.

In book 2 of his *De Theologia Gentili* (1641), Vossius returns to the examples in Augustine’s *City of God* to foreground the civil and fictitious aspects of pagan religion. He cites Augustine’s condemnation of the Roman priest Scaevola for shielding the people from the fictions of their religion: “The pontiff does not wish the people to know these things precisely because he does not think that such things are false. He considers it expedient, therefore, that cities should be deceived in matters of religion” (*City of God*, p. 176). The point of this passage for Vossius seems to be that pagans had a different conception of what counted as “fictional” in religion; even learned pagans like Scaevola assumed that a functional religion, though it is fictional, is actually somehow a “true” religion. Vossius then cites Varro’s tripartite theology. What is most striking about Vossius’s interpretation of this well-worn locus of pagan religion is that he refuses to make anything allegorical out of it. He grounds his interpretation on the social and fictive dimension, keeping his focus on the manufactured distinction between exoteric and esoteric understandings of natural mysteries: “In triplici hac theologia, nihil fabulari illa poetarum, quemadmodum ex allatis antea exemplis paret, fuerit insulsius, nisi ad allegorias recurratur. Atque ideo Dionysius

³³ Selden, *De Diis Syris* (rev. ed., 1629), in *Joannis Seldeni Jurisconsulti Opera Omnia*, ed. David Wilkins, 3 vols. (London, 1726), 2:250 (my translation).

Halicarnassensis in II Antiquit. Roman. in eo Romuli commendat prudentiam, quod neutiquam admiserit Graecorum fabulas de Diis. Quae licet vel occultent naturae arcana, vel ad solatium superstitum, aut aliud emolumentum, fuerint confictae; vulgus tamen, ut ibidem Dionysius censet, non penetrare haec arcana” (In this tripartite theology, nothing is more silly than the fabulous theology of the poets, in the ways that have been previously discussed, unless it is reduced to allegory. And for that reason Dionysius Halicarnassus in the second book of his Roman Antiquities commends the prudence of Romulus, because he never allowed the Greek stories about the gods. He grants that these stories were made up either to obscure the mysteries of nature, or as a comfort, or maybe even a benefit, to the superstitious; nevertheless, the vulgar, as Dionysius thinks, should not be able to see those mysteries).³⁴

But the real focus of the learned pagans was, as Vossius argues, to prop up the civil theology, even though it depended on fictions, and to find a way to dampen the bad behavior that poetry presents to the people (*poeticae huic theologiae praeferenda est civilis*). Varro, as Vossius relates from Augustine, would have founded Rome on the principles of nature, had he been in the place of Romulus or Numa. But as Vossius concludes, in order to explain the natural theology he will also have to show how it is bound up with the other kinds of theologies: “Placuit Varroni imprimis Theologia naturalis: quam ipsam deinceps exponam: sed sic ut suis misceam locis, quae ad civilem, vel fabularem, melius intelligendam pertineat” (309) (Varro liked the natural theology above all, which is the first thing I shall examine; but I will mix in those places that will produce a better understanding of the civil and poetic theologies too). Vossius is also treading close to Plato’s notion of poetry as a hindrance to the ideal city but as inextricably bound up with the functioning of the real city.

³⁴ Vossius, *De Theologia Gentili, seu Physiologia Christiana*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt, 1668), 308 (my translation). Further references will appear in the text.

So it is not a surprise that Vossius understands the fictions and errors of pagan religions to play out in the realm of symbolism and in issues of practice and worship. For Vossius, what might have been explainable allegorically to other mythographers is thrown back into the realm of politics and civil existence. Vossius notes the example of Nebuchadnezzar: “Sed posse adorationem civilem commutari in religiosam sive divinam: argumento fuerit illa; quam sibi in statuæ symbolum præstari voluit Nabuchodonosor” (28) (But civil adoration can be changed into religious, or divine, admiration; like that admiration that Nebuchadnezzar wanted to supply to himself, by means of the symbol of his statue). But Vossius goes on in the next few pages to distinguish between a “symbolic worship” (*cultus symbolicus*), which worships things for what they signify (such as a statue), and “worship proper” (*cultus proprius*), which worships things for what they are. Proper worship seems to share attributes with Christian worship: Vossius gives as one example of this kind of worship the veneration of the creator of the world (*opifex mundi*). But such veneration is corrupted when it is divided, “vel si Deus colatur in idolo” (31) (if God is worshipped in an idol). Vossius’s notion of proper worship is strikingly concrete; as elsewhere, he refuses to allegorize pagan religious practices.

Vossius’s aim is to describe what a “Christian physiology” (*Physiologia Christiana*), which is the subtitle of his book, might look like, and thus his scholarship remains pointedly connected to the natural functioning of God’s creation. And as he argues repeatedly, we have to judge God’s creation in terms of its function and end, not in terms of its form. To take one example among thousands in Vossius’s book, he advises us not to underestimate insects because of their size: “Nec censeri debent magnitudine molis, sed virtutis: cum Deus saepe in minimis maxima collocarit miracula: unde gemmam praeferimus saxo” (1525) (they ought

not to judged by the size of the body, but by its power: just as God often worked the greatest miracles by means of the smallest things, and as we prefer the gem to the stone). The highest and lowest are often similar if you look at function, a point that also serves as the basis for his theology: the idea of natural function replacing the dangers of formal or symbolic abstractions. However, this rearrangement threatens to obscure revelation and replace it with a religion based on natural “artificium,” a secular space where the workings of nature were appreciated for their ends and not their forms, and God was a somewhat absent craftsman. As Vossius concludes his chapter on insects, he notes that these small, intricate forms are also difficult to manipulate: “In qualibus non dubium est, quin subtilius ac maius sit artificium; cum quo minus est materiae, hoc minus sit sequax ac tractabilis ad variorum adeo partium figurationem” (ibid.) (in these things there is no doubt that there can be no greater or more subtle workmanship; and wherever material is less, it is to that degree less tractable and responsive to the shaping of its various parts). The artistry of small forms seems to replace, or at least to equal, the mysteries of revelation. This is to found a theology on a functional symbolism based on a study of the natural world.

To what purpose, though? It sounds as Vossius would have us practice a religion based on natural *functions*, which themselves are based on the artistry of God, who often does the greatest things with the smallest means. This is not a traditional “natural religion,” wherein God and his commands are known intuitively, but an artificial religion mediated by knowledge of the way that nature works.³⁵ Investigating the pagan “mistake” of dividing nature into devotional objects has led Vossius to an altogether different understanding of a religion based on knowledge, nature, and most importantly artifice. Martin Mulrow contrasts

³⁵ For a reading of Selden’s and Vossius’s views of religious rites as “functional” and “utilitarian,” rather than “natural,” see Jonathan Sheehan, “The Altars of the Idols: Religion, Sacrifice, and the Early Modern Polity,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67 (2006): 669.

this interpretive strategy with Edward Herbert's, who aggressively seeks out examples of Vossius's *cultus symbolicus* to argue that, in most cases, pagan worship can be reduced to the veneration of abstract principles.³⁶ Indeed, Herbert's recourse to older, more traditional methods of finding religious unity makes Vossius's method, and Selden's, seem all the more novel.

But it really was not all that novel, as I have been arguing. There was a much greater awareness of just how the pagan religious outlook differed from the Christian, and an accompanying fascination with the symbolic economy that structured pagan art and, in a related sense, its civil society. This connection, between fiction and civil forms, has been overlooked, though it is rapidly attaining modern students. The space between poetry and civil religion in the early modern world provides a point at which to examine a redefinition of the power and role of fiction in many forms: artistic, religious, political, and literary. My study thus attempts to fill in one province, the literary, of a much larger region that is currently being occupied by an interdisciplinary group of scholars united around the legacy of secularism, religious transformation, and power of fiction and myth in the early modern world and our own.

Varro's Theologies and Renaissance Art in Twentieth-Century Scholarship

Varro's theologies, and Augustine's response to them, set the stage for both modern and early modern conceptions of the relationship between pagan art and Christian society. The appropriation of pagan arts, especially poetic arts, was justified as long as the deeper truths of those arts were kept hidden from the uninitiated vulgar. Giovanni Boccaccio, for example,

³⁶ Mulsow, "Antiquarianism and Idolatry: The *Historia* of Religions in the Seventeenth Century," in *Historia: Empiricism and Erudition in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Gianna Pomata and Nancy G. Siraisi (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 202–3.

repeated Varro's threefold theology in his *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*; but the fourteenth-century poet aligns the best poetry with the "natural" theology, while shunning the fabulous and civil theologies as overly accommodated to popular tastes and political necessities. But whereas Augustine remained wary of appropriating pagan natural theology, Boccaccio goes to considerable lengths to justify it. And again unlike Augustine, Boccaccio has a fairly optimistic view of the church's spiritual and earthly conquests over paganism. Indeed, Boccaccio thought that Christianity's victory over paganism made it acceptable for learned Christian poets to study the theology of the gentiles and use the pagan gods to express allegorical truths. This victory extends to the present, even implying ownership: "the church victorious occupies the camps of its enemies" (*victrix Ecclesia castra possidet hostium*). But, he cautioned, no one should approach the gentile theology until he knew fully about Christian religion (*plene Christiana religio cognita*).³⁷ This very powerful idea became one of the defining features of the "Renaissance" in the hands of Jacob Burckhardt. Responding to this passage from Boccaccio, Burckhardt comments, "the writer justifies the new relation in which his age stood to paganism. . . . This is the argument invariably used in later times to defend the Renaissance." But Burckhardt never lets us forget that this afterlife of antiquity had a genuinely troubling history. In the next paragraph Burckhardt becomes rather elliptical in proposing a counter-factual hypothesis:

There was thus a new cause in the world and a new class of men to maintain it. It is idle to ask if this cause ought not to have stopped short in its career of victory, to have restrained itself deliberately, and conceded the first place to purely national elements of culture. No conviction was more firmly rooted in the popular mind than that antiquity was the highest title to glory which Italy possessed.³⁸

³⁷ Boccaccio, *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium* . . . *cum annotationibus Iacobi Micylli* (Basel, 1532), 393 (15.19).

³⁸ Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860), trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 131.

It is difficult to know exactly what Burckhardt meant by this. Attentive as he was to the potential for demagoguery among Renaissance princes, this is perhaps a warning that the cult of antiquity promised a somewhat ahistorical, atavistic justification of power. That this kind of power derives from the “victory” of Christianity over its great foe and the appropriation of its gods merely reinforces the imperialistic tendencies of this kind of revival of antiquity. And indeed, this is how some modern scholars read the pagan gods in the Renaissance: with a nod to Burckhardt and the cultural approbation of political authoritarianism.³⁹

For the next generation of Renaissance scholars after Burckhardt, the complexity of Renaissance allegory seemed to offer a pathway to a cultural history of art that would redefine the “revival” of classical art as multiform, an art of movement as it was for Aby Warburg.⁴⁰ The political aspects of this project were sometimes hidden, but there can be little doubt that scholars like Warburg and Edgar Wind saw the political implications of their investigations into pagan allegory and mysticism.⁴¹ For Warburg, Boccaccio’s dictum does not quite hold true: the wild, irrational forces of pagan religion and culture will always resist the “victory” of Christianity and will always complicate artistic appropriation. Influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*, Warburg saw the dialectical play of Apollonian and Dionysian elements in culture as replicating itself in the afterlife (*Nachleben*) of the classical tradition, making art and the artist indices for the larger, conflicting play of forces in any

³⁹ See especially Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 77–97. Teskey argues that the importance of the gods was that they joined “political authority to spiritually resonant cultural forms” (79).

⁴⁰ See Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion* (New York: Zone Books, 2004), 67–92.

⁴¹ For discussion of the contemporary significance of Warburg’s method and scholarship, see Charlotte Schoell-Glass, *Aby Warburg and Anti-semitism: Political Perspectives on Images and Culture* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2008); and Jane O. Newman, “Enchantment in Times of War: Aby Warburg, Walter Benjamin, and the Secularization Thesis,” *Representations* 105, no. 1 (2009): 133–67.

given culture.⁴² In one sense, though, Boccaccio's warning against the popular superstition that might accompany unlearned access to pagan mysteries continued to influence Warburg and his students, Warburg's own method being a testament to this idea.

Warburg began his academic career as a student of Hegel's successors, those scholars interested in the forces of civilized development and the processes by which "primitive" transforms into "modern." Warburg's intellectual development was shaped by the psychological Hegelianism of his teachers, the project of determining how sensory impressions change individuals and societies and thus condition the artistic forms available to them.⁴³ Warburg, though, saw a good deal more contingency in artistic production: for him a normative antiquity struggled against the specific uses of antiquity among artists who felt the pressure of patrons and princes. But even the "normative" antiquity was a constant in human civilization, and so Warburg's interpretation of the cultural changes in the Renaissance was also an interpretation of a familiar dialectical struggle within every culture.⁴⁴ Thus, to reveal the secrets of artistic expression does not necessarily proceed from "primitive" to "modern," but rather testifies to the eternal regression and progression of these tendencies, of which art was a fair index. As he remarked after a lecture on the Palazzo Schifanoia, he hoped that his methodology might lead others to treat the ancient, medieval, and modern worlds as a "coherent historical unity" demonstrating the "international process of dialectical engagement with the surviving imagery of Eastern Mediterranean pagan culture."⁴⁵ It was

⁴² See Matthew Rampley, "From Symbol to Allegory: Aby Warburg's Theory of Art," *The Art Bulletin* 79 (1997): 46–51.

⁴³ E. H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1970), 30–31.

⁴⁴ See Ernst H. Gombrich, "The Nineteenth Century Notion of a Pagan Revival," in *Art History as Cultural History: Warburg's Projects*, ed. Richard Woodfield (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 2001), 55–64.

not enough, for Warburg, to identify a progression of classical art among the early moderns. Atavistic tendencies in any culture always appropriate images and ideas in order to dehistoricize and decontextualize them, by way of allegorical or moral traditions. Warburg's project, especially as it was interpreted after the second World War, was to demystify the very specific and local appropriations of antiquity in order to show how artistic expression alternately mystified and allegorized the past but also made it accessible by making it "modern," that is individual, subjective, and free from the constraints of systematic interpretations.

This balancing act, between the obscurantist and the progressive tendencies in the study of the *Nachleben* of antiquity, drew the intellectual boundary lines of Warburg's students as well. Edgar Wind's fascinating and multifaceted career provides a striking example of the complexities of Warburg's project. Wind's great book, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, was formed out of a series of lectures he prepared in the 1940s and 50s and, as Rebecca Zorach has demonstrated, became Wind's response to the political appropriation of classical images and allegories that the world had seen in Germany before the war.⁴⁶ In what follows, I rely on her research to sketch Wind's career and the early history of his book on pagan mysteries.

In the 1930s, Wind lectured on the power of art at the University of Hamburg; like Warburg, he was attentive to the irrational forces that art could conjure in the human psyche. Images, however, were complex: they naturally resisted the utopian drive to create an

⁴⁵ Warburg, "Italian Art and International Astrology in the Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara (1912)," in *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, introduced by Kurt W. Forster, trans. David Britt (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999), 585–86.

⁴⁶ Zorach, "Love, Truth, Orthodoxy, Reticence; or, What Edgar Wind Didn't See in Botticelli's *Primavera*," *Critical Inquiry* 34 (2007): 190–224.

orderly, rational state. Images instantiated a tension between reason and ritual, demanding a recognition of the potential interplay of conflicting values. This was the basis, Wind emphasized, of Plato's rejection of images; not because they were copies of ideas, but because they undermined the state, Plato barred fictions and images from his republic. The investigation of images, therefore, could provide a way to gauge conflicting values and, ultimately, make a choice informed by history, context, and meaning. The rise of Nazism provided a pointed alternative, a society that valued tradition, form, and mysticism at the expense of history, reason, and choice. But such was the tension in the study of images: the appropriation of their historical content was not always easily recognized as such.

This tension informed Wind's response to the American curriculum he encountered when he came to the University of Chicago in 1939. The university was embarking on its Great Books project in the early 40s, which privileged both ideas and traditions that were often and obviously at odds with each other. Wind, a German Jewish exile, saw the flaws of this system, which put him in opposition to Richard McKeon, the dean of the humanities division and the architect of the new courses. Indeed, one of the most contentious episodes from these years accompanied Wind's title of a series of talks McKeon asked him to give: "Pagan and Christian Mysticism in the Art of the Renaissance." The key terms here are "pagan" and "mysticism"; the latter contradicted an urge among professors to identify the Renaissance with the advance of reason, individualism, and "pure" art. The implicit secularizing drive characterized, and perhaps still does to some extent, the response to the idea of the "Renaissance."

No less troubling was the term "pagan," associated as it was with Hitler's Germany. The year was 1942: that same year the Chicago economist John U. Nef published *The United*

States and Civilization, in which he linked Germany's militarism with its "pagan" culture, by which he meant the atavistic worship of an unidentifiable, ahistorical past. He argued that "among the Germans, traditions which are pagan and hostile to both Christianity and humanism seem to be more powerful than among the other great nations of the West."⁴⁷ This was a widely held opinion in the years before and during the second World War. The historian Arnold Toynbee expressed something similar in an essay from 1937, "The Menace of the New Paganism." He identifies what he calls a "postwar paganism," which gave rise to Communism and Fascism, ideologies that promote the "idolatrous worship of organized human power."⁴⁸ Such a characterization was ratified by no less than President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in his state of the union address in January of 1942, two months after the attacks on Pearl Harbor. FDR famously and forcefully orated that the Nazis wanted to enforce "their new German, pagan religion all over the world."⁴⁹ In this context, Wind's insistence on keeping both "pagan" and "mysticism" must have seemed strange. Yet, his rationale was fairly simple: the element of unreason or mysticism in culture was inextricably linked to the idea of cultural change, which usually brought about what he called a "cultural revival." As Wind described this field of study for the Chicago curriculum:

The student will be expected to form an idea of the general problem of *cultural revivals*, of which the historical period called the *Renaissance* is only one among many examples. The common characteristic of these revivals is that the revolt against a given tradition is coupled with the attempt to re-instate an older, supposedly more "genuine" tradition, so that revolution and restitution go hand in hand. To trace the manner in which the traditional and novel features interpenetrate and reinforce each other, is the central problem of Renaissance studies. (qtd. in Zorach, 202; italics in original)

⁴⁷ Nef, *The United States and Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), 102.

⁴⁸ Toynbee, "The Menace of the New Paganism," in *The Christian Century Reader*, ed. Harold E. Fey and Margaret Frakes (New York: Association Press, 1962), 41.

⁴⁹ Roosevelt, "The State of the Union: Our Task is Hard—the Time is Short," *Vital Speeches of the Day* 68, no. 9 (2002): 285.

In this passage Wind is critiquing the formalism that depended on clear-cut distinctions of “genuine” traditions from other, less “genuine” ones. In other words, the scholar of the Renaissance has to examine such things as paganism and mysticism precisely because these ideas and terms were fraught with imprecise historical and intellectual weight. The imprecision of the idea of cultural revival allowed opportunistic cultural imperialists like the Nazis to create false traditions based on ancient culture and label them more genuine than others. So, Wind’s curricular imperative to distinguish between different forms of “genuine” traditions was his way of fighting the identification of history with culture, a point of view that he believed enforced totalitarian appropriations of cultural images and symbols as synonymous with historical developments of a given people or nation.

This perspective did not endear him to fellow Chicago professors, the more eloquent of whom argued that Wind’s system would merely replace one cultural judge with another, namely Wind himself. Ronald Crane, for example, thought that Wind’s method ignored individual cases and tried to impose on the Renaissance a system of interpretation that would erase the need for careful interpretation of particular texts and traditions and ask students to see it as merely a conglomeration of competing historical paradigms (Zorach, p. 203). And so Wind never gave the lectures McKeon asked him to prepare, instead publishing them as *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* with Yale University Press in 1958. We can now approach this work with a view into the political, social, intellectual, and academic forces that were at work on Wind during the time in which the book took shape. This extraordinary work continues to exert influence in Renaissance studies, but its complexities are not often noted. In particular, it is all too easy to identify Wind with the mystagogues he examines, and to assume that Wind wanted to argue that the Neo-Platonic mysteries themselves were

positive sources of value for him and for the Renaissance itself.⁵⁰ Far from it. Wind was acutely aware of the implications of the interpretive work he was engaged in, and it seems that he took to heart the potential formalist critique of his explication of the historical and intellectual content of mystical symbolism. The reward of iconography, he writes, “is that it may help to remove the veil of obscurity which not only distance in time (although in itself sufficient for that purpose) but a deliberate obliqueness in the use of metaphor has spread over some of the greatest Renaissance paintings. They were designed for initiates; hence they require an initiation.”⁵¹ He sounds an anxious note right from the start:

I hope therefore I shall not be misunderstood as favouring the doctrine of mysteries I am about to expound. The axiom proposed by Pico della Mirandola, that for mysteries to be deep they must be obscure, seems to me as untrue as the pernicious axiom of Burke that ‘a clear idea is another name for a little idea’. But there is no evading the fact, however unpleasant, that a great art did flourish on that impure soil. In studying the subject I shall strive for clarity, an objectionable aim from the point of view of the Renaissance mystagogues themselves. Yet the understanding of these disturbing

⁵⁰ In criticism on Renaissance and ancient syncretism, there is a tendency to dwell on the tenuous pseudo-unity that Wind exhaustively describes and decries. The importance of understanding the sources and methods of Renaissance syncretism is undeniable, however. From the vast scholarship on this topic, see especially Marjorie O’Rourke Boyle, *Christening Pagan Mysteries: Erasmus in Pursuit of Wisdom* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981); H. David Brumble, *Classical Myths and Legends in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* □: *a Dictionary of Allegorical Meanings* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998); Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (1964; repr., London: Routledge, 1999); Don Cameron Allen, *Mysteriously Meant: the Rediscovery of Pagan Symbolism and Allegorical Interpretation in the Renaissance*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970); Ann Moss, *Poetry and Fable* □: *Studies in Mythological Narrative in Sixteenth-century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Frank Grady, *Representing Righteous Heathens in Late Medieval England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); D. P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology; Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1972); Charles W. Lemmi, *The Classic Deities in Bacon; a Study in Mythological Symbolism*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins press, 1933); Brian A. Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance: The Afterlife of Ancient Egypt in Early Modern Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Harry Levin, *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969); Joscelyn Godwin, *The Pagan Dream of the Renaissance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 2002); and Arnold Williams, “The Two Matters: Classical and Christian in the Renaissance,” *Studies in Philology* 38 (1941): 158–64. See also Louis Bouyer, *The Christian Mystery: From Pagan Myth to Christian Mysticism* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989); Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede, *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999); Gerard J. P. O’Daly, *Platonism Pagan and Christian: Studies in Plotinus and Augustine* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001); and Stephen Mitchell and Peter Van Nuffelen, *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁵¹ Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, 2nd ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 15; hereafter abbreviated *PM*, further references will appear in the text.

phenomena is not furthered by succumbing to them, any more than by ignoring their existence. (*PM*, 16)

Wind is investigating “disturbing” phenomena, rooted in an “impure” soil. The Nazification of pagan art evidently still bothered him when this book went to press. There is certainly an echo of Wind’s earlier worries about investigating the murky historical origins of artistic products. Perhaps even more troubling is his strident warning that we not “succumb” to the phenomena he is about to describe. *Caveat lector!*

One need not read far in Wind’s book to get a dose of such medicine, and it is from the start that Wind subtly recalls the distinctions made influential by Varro, Augustine, and their mythographic followers. His first chapter concerns the “Poetic Theology” of Pico della Mirandola, who “held that pagan religions, without exception, had used a ‘hieroglyphic’ imagery; that they had concealed their revelations in myths and fables which were designed to distract the attention of the multitude, and so protect the divine secrets from profanation” (*PM*, 17). Wind’s dismantling of this plank of Neo-Platonic doctrine emphasizes the way that so-called “genuine” traditions are created within cultural revivals, and one hears echoes of Wind’s Chicago curriculum:

For the secret affinity which Pico so ingeniously discovered between pagan and biblical revelations, the historical cause is depressingly simple. Whether neo-Orphic, Cabbalistic, or pseudo-Dionysian, the sources adduced by Pico were all late-antique, if not medieval. . . . The pagan revival to which he adhered was therefore less a ‘revival of the classics’ than a recrudescence of that ugly thing which has been called ‘late-antique syncretism’. . . . He persistently claimed, as several romantic scholars have claimed since, that in the recondite and often monstrous decomposition which the classical heritage suffered in the Hellenistic age the genuine and permanent foundations of the classical achievement are laid bare. (*PM*, 22)

The layers of historical deception coalesce for Pico, according to Wind, in a new kind of tradition that depends for its force both on present intellectual needs and its stamp of

antiquity. Wind is sharply critical of the historical and natural pretensions of this kind of allegory. The next chapter begins with a quotation from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, in which the narrator describes the philosophy of the fallen devils in book 2: "Vain wisdom all and false philosophy, / Yet with a pleasing sorcery could charm" (*PM*, 26). Wind comments, "If allegory were only what it is reputed to be—an artifice by which a set of ideas are attached, one by one, to a set of images—it would be difficult to account for its nefarious use. Since there is little demand for repeating the simple, and no advantage in doubling the complicated, an image designed to duplicate a thought should be either superfluous or distracting" (*PM*, 26–27). The function of allegory is as a "sophistical" device, by which "imagination and thought" become irritants to each other (*PM*, 27). Allegory is a "monster" that "often precedes the god" (*ibid.*). Ultimately, though, Wind remains equivocal about the value of this kind of deception. Allegory is "useful," for its absurdities are an *aide-mémoire*, though just what one is asked to remember is unclear in Wind's formulation.

By the end of the book, Wind has started to give us hints of the political relevance of the mysticism that both fascinates and repels him. His interlocutors are the fifteenth-century Italian philosopher Nicholas Cusanus and the seventeenth-century English politician George Halifax. Cusanus's pacifism, his professed desire to reconcile competing theological traditions within his philosophy, elicits some sympathy from Wind, probably because Cusanus had no need for allegory. Indeed, for him all traditions and signification pointed to one inexpressible signified; this rejection of "hieroglyphic" meaning limited the possibility of expressibility and understanding. The "remembrance" that might make allegory useful is, for Cusanus, to realize that all rituals and external expressions of divinity point back to "an infinite perfection"; for "the signs vary, but not the signified" (*PM*, 220). Wind links this

idea to Halifax's characterization of the world power of Britain deriving from its isolation from the rest of the world. Cusanus's manipulation of center and periphery in his philosophy, "pushing the contraries to their extremes," confirms "the observations of practical politics. To be placed outside a political situation is to occupy a privileged position within it" (*PM*, 228). As Wind concludes his discussion, "Mystics who yearn for union with God often fail in circumspection; and prudent men, while they may be skilled in the art of trimming, are rarely propelled by mystical ardours. Yet only those who can combine these two qualities in one person could be said, at least in some measure, to achieve the Janus-face of perfection" (*PM*, 230). Such a sentiment reveals the never fully resolved tensions of this work, between an examination of allegory designed to manipulate, and the practical understanding that the critic encourages in unveiling the eccentricities of mystical art and knowledge.

Wind's position encouraged an engagement with politics that was manifestly critical of its legitimating mystical imagery. The arts, he thought, must be unveiled and also deployed in the service of public life. As Zorach recounts, Wind helped to organize a conference on "Art and Morals" at Smith College in 1953; his position was explicitly set to counter "those who saw art as an autonomous aesthetic realm separate from the pressing needs of politics or economics" (Zorach, 219). He even urged W. H. Auden to use his art to become more engaged with civic life. But as Auden pointed out in a poem dedicated to Wind, all art addressed to public power must mask itself and ultimately ends up having recourse to the impersonal and universal; it replicates the kind of mystical distancing that Wind wanted to critique. Of course, on the other hand a fiction that does engage with the particular and the human reveals the manipulations of the universalists. Wind wrote this kind of tension into *Pagan Mysteries*, in which reason and unreason continually conflict but

structure not only the mysticism designed to manipulate but also the philosophical systems designed to unveil the mysteries and put them to the service of practical politics.

A similar tension informs the work of another Warburg-influenced art historian, Jean Seznec. He was a resident scholar at the Warburg library in London before and during the war, when he wrote his influential *The Survival of the Pagan Gods* (first ed. 1940). One has to derive his reaction to the political circumstances from his work, but this is not very difficult to do. Indeed, his work contains familiar misgivings about the nature of allegory and the tradition of synthesizing pagan and Christian symbols in the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. For Seznec, the “Renaissance” is that brief moment when humanist science and medieval allegory could co-exist; but the two poles, scientific knowledge and allegorical moralizing, pull apart inevitably in the later sixteenth century. It is a familiar narrative, but what is striking is Seznec’s discomfort with it, his sense, perhaps instinct, that the allegories could not be as naïve as he thought, or that comparative mythography should not have proved to be so effective at destroying such allegories. As with Wind, Seznec suppresses the civil, political theology of the ancients and deflects it into allegory, though he clearly knows that the tradition he investigates was never as naïve as he thought. This leads to some awkward moments in his work, when he seems willfully ignorant of the real forces at work, especially in the Middle Ages.

He divides the first part of the book into a version of Varro’s three theologies, but renames them. The “physical tradition” remains intact, but we get the “moral tradition” in place of the poetic theology and the “historical tradition” in place of the civil theology. By historical tradition Seznec means Euhemerism, which was never as influential as he represents it, sketching its origins in the ecclesiastical histories of Eusebius of Caesarea. In

fact, Eusebius does discuss Euhemerus and his theories as evidence that the pagan gods were once men, and Seznec recounts this idea. But he writes that by the time of Eusebius, the idea had lost some of its “polemic venom” and had become a legitimate impetus for historical investigation, for Eusebius was not only a polemicist but also a historian. Seznec argues that by pointing out the synchronism of the god Baal and the war between the Giants and the Titans, Eusebius was making an argument about the antiquity of the Judaic religion, indeed its historical precedence over the *religio gentium*. But it is misleading to interpret Eusebius’s work like this (or only like this), to say “that Eusebius’s main concern is to show the religion of the chosen people as antedating pagan mythology.”⁵² This is really not Eusebius’s main concern, which was to demonstrate how the pagan political system anticipated and indeed became the Christian empire, which combined religious and political authority under the emperor himself. The historical synchronism, and his passing references to Euhemerus, were a way to legitimate the political order of Christian rulers, and to suggest that the pagan civil religion, a religion made by men, could be subjugated to Christian history and made to perform the same tasks for Christian emperors. That the “historical tradition” that Seznec recounts was really a tradition of political authority is never absolutely clear. Like Wind, Seznec shies away from speaking directly to the relationship between pagan religion and politics. Seznec everywhere talks of “parallelism” between pagan and Christian in the Middle Ages, when rulers busied their artists to place them among the pagan pantheon, alongside Christian symbols too, of course (28). The problem with all this is that Seznec too readily accepts an identification of the pagan gods with “worldly power,” with a secularism that is more Augustinian than Eusebian. The point of Eusebius’s history was to set up a parallel

⁵² Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art*, trans. Barbara F. Sessions, Bollingen Series 83 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 14. Further references will appear in the text.

political theology for the Christians, in which the sacred and the secular exist not merely side by side but on the same plane and in the same person.⁵³ Ignoring this aspect of Eusebius's project results in thinking that there could be a wholly secular "synthesis" of pagan and Christian in an arena free from the push and pull of poetic and political theologies.

Seznec's "physical" and "moral" traditions have been pretty well assimilated into scholarly writing on the Renaissance, and there is little need to summarize them here. They are well presented, but the second part of Seznec's book should alert the reader as to what is missing from the first part. It becomes readily apparent that Seznec has in mind some idea of a "pure" classicism to which he contrasts the mythographic traditions of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, denigrated as uncritical and overly syncretistic. "Our mythographers," he writes, "are even more lacking in historical sense than in critical faculty" (241). For Seznec, this corruption of the classics is both somewhat harmless but also potentially dangerous at the same time. The very absurdity of the mythographic faith in the analogy between pagan and Christian plays with a troubling strain of allegorical deception. Like Wind, Seznec is uncomfortable with the naïve allegories of syncretism, which threaten a kind of secular/sacred mixture that, in his view, simply did not occur in the Middle Ages, since profane erudition existed in the realm of the merely secular. As for the "absurd analogues" themselves:

One can view [them] as the result of a harmless obsession, and smile upon them indulgently. Without doubt, many sincere believers who were at the same time ardent students of literature associated their profane erudition and

⁵³ For this tradition of Eusebian "political theology," see R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 55–59. Eusebius's histories provided an enduring example of political theology that Ernst H. Kantorowicz saw in medieval theories of sovereignty inherited from antiquity; see his *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957); his *Laudes Regiae: A Study of Liturgical Acclamations and Mediaeval Ruler Worship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1946); and Victoria Kahn's introduction to a special issue of *Representations* on secularism and political theology (*Representations* 105, no. 1 [2009]: 1–11).

their faith naïvely and with no mental reservation. For them allegory was merely a flower-strewn path leading from one to the other. But it must be admitted that, basically, allegory is often sheer imposture, used to reconcile the irreconcilable—just as we have seen it lending decency to the manifestly indecent. On both grounds, it is a dangerous fraud. (274)

What Seznec is not quite saying is also what Wind was not quite saying: that allegory is dangerous because it threatens to fictionalize genuine political and religious ideas under the veil of an ersatz tradition.

One may summarize Seznec's conclusions as follows. For Seznec the movement of the pagan gods proceeds from the realm of harmless assimilation into secular culture, then into a brief time of truly classical worship of beauty and life, and then into a scholarly age that cynically deploys the medieval allegories as a religious mask for artistic extravagance. The Renaissance is that brief moment when the classical past was present in daily life, when there was no need for mythographical explanations of the gods and one merely had to look around to experience beauty, nature, and life as continuous with an erudite version of the past. But the moment one has to defend such a view of life, one resorts to allegorical explanations that obscure the presence of the classical world. The result is a distancing of the past, an "era of crisis" (320) in which scholarship intervenes to cool the passions that the gods represent. This produces an irreconcilable break with the past in which the classical world becomes an ideal Arcadia, accessible only through the compromises of "the demands and conventions of morality," which turn each of the gods into "an edifying symbol" (321). Seznec, at the very end of his book, acknowledges somewhat the attractions of formalism, which considers the only authentic tradition to be an eternal one, outside the realm of historical symbols and mediated interpretations.

As he concludes, the Renaissance briefly attained a kind of lived immediacy of the pagan past, a synthesis of belief and knowledge, “as if man had at last penetrated to the inner meaning of mythology, now that he was engaged in rehabilitating, along with physical beauty, the realm of nature and the flesh” (320). This makes sense of his decision to portray the medieval appropriation of the gods overwhelmingly in terms of allegory, and to rename Varro’s theologies. The history of cultural renewal proceeds, for Seznec, from a period of mixture through one of secularism and finally toward one of division. All eras did not have equal access to the symbolic structure that would interpret pagan arts in terms of their relationship to poetic, natural, and civil theologies, according to Seznec. Again, this explains what he did not talk about, the religious reliance on fictions that Wind saw in all allegorical thinking. But the reluctance to talk about religion also originates, for both scholars, from a reluctance to argue for fiction and allegory as a universal constant of all religions, a conclusion to which the careful study of Renaissance paganism might lead the devoted initiate.

Here, then, is the crux of the problem for the Warburg historians whose constructions of the renewal of pagan antiquity remain so influential. They saw that the Renaissance project of allegorical “synthesis” never worked very well but they did not take the logical next step that would have opened up a good deal of Renaissance mythography, art, and literature in their contextual complexity. This next step would have entailed examining how the Renaissance writers they examined also critiqued the allegorical tradition. Seznec did not recognize the degree to which the mythographers struggled with the internal contradictions of pagan natural and civil theologies, and the extent to which the allegorical deceptions were recognized in the Renaissance and worried over. A truer account of these mythographers,

then, would emphasize not naïve synthesis and allegorical integration, but their constant, tentative forays into the artistic and religious disruptions working against any kind of allegorical synthesis. In fact, often the people who were interested in pagan myths and stories were interested in them because of this disruptive power; they approached the myths with the intention of using them as negative examples of the dangerous theologies that they advocated. But examining ancient religions in the Renaissance blurred the lines between art, religion, and politics, throwing into disarray the distinctions that made artistic objects signify apart from religious objects.

The problem for Seznec, and for Wind, is that they both had in their minds an untenable concept of an authentic classicism, which, according to them, the Renaissance syncretists and allegorists misunderstood and perverted. They were more interested in Renaissance attempts to assimilate the classical world rather than other Renaissance attempts to differentiate it. And so they overlook one of the most obvious aspects of the reception of the classical world because they think it does not matter. That is, they take for granted the idea that most Renaissance Christians found pagan myths and religions to be false, ridiculous, misleading, and potentially evil. And they also miss their chance to explain the consequences of the Renaissance concept of false religion, the way that false religion placed artistic representation in the service of politics and social organization. And finally, they miss one of the most important developments of the discourse of false religion, which is the potential for this discourse to provide the form for later methods of comparative religion. So, Seznec rejects the “allegory” because it threatens to erase the historical and scholarly distinction he deploys against the Renaissance mythographers, who are in his opinion bad historians. Allegory elides different historical periods in a misleading way, which gives rise

to different, equally misleading forms of the “idealized” past that is being interpreted allegorically. Seznec perhaps saw this process being carried out in Nazi Germany, where a fuzzy sense of history led to a stunning allegory of German greatness based on primitive myths of an atavistic ideal. I am suggesting, however, that the Renaissance was not necessarily always guilty of this kind of misleading allegorical synthesis. Renaissance authors had in the idea of “false religion” a discourse ready made to analyze the troubling history of political appropriations of religion and its art forms. Indeed, Seznec is aware of all the problems with the allegorical tradition, he simply does not discuss how the Renaissance also thought through the problems with that same tradition.

It is remarkable how often this narrative about allegory and the classical past in the Renaissance replicates itself among the scholars and critics of Seznec’s generation. Douglas Bush, for example, writing on mythology and the concept of the Renaissance in English poetry in 1932, similarly lamented the allegorical tradition as one that applied a secret moral philosophy to the naturalistic philosophy of paganism. In the seventeenth century, the allegorical temper exists beside a philosophical, scholarly approach to myth; both are not really pagan, classical, or secular. As Bush puts it, “Although the allegorical theory of poetry had enabled Ovid and some Ovidian poems to take on a protective coloring, the best-known pieces, like Marlowe’s and Shakespeare’s, laid no claim to hidden moral truth. They were pagan, and it depended upon the reader’s upbringing whether the paganism were glorious or wicked.”⁵⁴ For those who considered it wicked, allegory served much the same function as the demystifying science of Baconian philosophy; it drew myths into the Christian religious tradition of separating true from false, divine from secular. In fact, for Bush, “pagan” is

⁵⁴ Bush, *Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition in English Poetry*, rev. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1963), 256.

another word for “secular,” and the resistance to secularism is the result of a time when “culture is rapidly broadening down from ignorance to ignorance, through layer after layer of the middle class.”⁵⁵ Bush may be curt, but there is some depth here. Seznec might have said something similar about the way that allegory and science were the two poles of religious naivety, a faith in integration on one end and a faith in ultimate distinctions on the other. According to Bush, both allegory and science distort “authentic” paganism, which appears in the poetry of Marlowe and Shakespeare as an experience of natural life and pleasure unmediated by transcendence. Bush has no time for the religious or political complexity of this idea, for the ways that the validation of pagan natural religion and art actually proceeded out of religious distinctions of true and false rather than from religious naivety.

Bush’s generation of scholars was relatively coherent in their views of religion and the ancient world, which remain influential. Indeed, their influence may have stemmed from the force of their convictions and the urgency of the unspoken terms of their defense of imaginative literature and tradition against the forces that would rend it into atavistic and scholarly artifacts. One senses Bush’s and Seznec’s contacts with the great scholarly currents of their time, rushing toward a totalizing explanation of religion and a theory of unity outside of religion. Bush and Seznec were both fascinated by what Bush calls “ignorance” and Seznec terms a “naïve” mentality: an acceptance of myth as a belief system, despite the difficulties posed by natural knowledge, philosophy, or competing belief systems. For both, an authentic paganism barely exists, but if it does then it is something like an applied natural theology, in which natural knowledge produces not distinctions or fictions but a connection to beauty and the immediacy of the natural world. In defending pagan fictions they sound a

⁵⁵ Ibid.

lot like Varro might have, who underwrites the poetic theology with natural knowledge, though they pointedly and problematically ignore his civil theology.

But the idea of natural immediacy that moves beyond the merely symbolic informs so much of mid- twentieth-century understandings of religion as well, especially for those devoted to a phenomenological approach. Paul Ricoeur and Mircea Eliade, for example, thought seriously about the same problems of naivety and belief when they tried to develop their theories of religious symbolism. Ricoeur thought that the conflict between an ontological naivety and the demythologization of modern thought produced the “tensive” character of metaphor itself. His conception of metaphor is based upon the possibility of a “metaphor-faith beyond demythologization,” and a “second *naïveté* beyond iconoclasm.”⁵⁶ In his journals, Eliade noted his sympathy with Ricoeur because he was also looking into religious symbolism as “the key by which modern man can still penetrate into the religious phenomenon.”⁵⁷ For Ricoeur and Eliade alike, religion functions as an intermediary between symbols and the myths and stories that manifest those symbols. It is worth noting that Eliade’s great work on the idea of the sacred sees it as a fleeting sense of division from the “profane,” much like Ricoeur’s second *naïveté* that proceeds beyond iconoclasm and demythologization. Eliade himself sought the basis for all religions in God’s abandonment of the world, creating a kind of secular space that he would come to call “profane.” The recognition of the validity of paganism in the Renaissance is part of this larger narrative of

⁵⁶ Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello, SJ (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 254.

⁵⁷ Eliade, *No Souvenirs: Journal, 1957–1969*, trans. Fred H. Robinson, Jr. (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 68. Further references will appear in the text.

the creation of secularism, which proceeds from a sense of god's absence and the legitimacy of the natural world. On September 2, 1959, Eliade writes:

I'm reading certain pages of Giordano Bruno. Stunned by the boldness of his thought. He recognizes the religious authenticity of paganism. He was already urging the mystery of God's abandonment of the world, the transformation of God into a *deus otiosus* [inactive God]. God, *come assoluto, non ha che far con noi* [as he is absolute, has nothing to do with us] (*Spaccio*, Gentile edition, II, 192). God's withdrawal or eclipse, which obsesses the theological thought of today, is a much more ancient spiritual phenomenon. Moreover, it begins with "civilization." *Deus otiosus* characterizes all cultures which have gone beyond the hunting and gathering stage and have taken up gardening and the cultivation of grain. (59; my translations in brackets)

In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Eliade argues that this withdrawal of God structures the experience of all religions, and so the basis for the sacred is the practical effects of recreating the same withdrawal from the profane world. Thus the sacred *shows itself* to us through hierophany, and we can only know the sacred through a mysterious act, "the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of our natural 'profane' world."⁵⁸ In Eliade's insistence of the paradox of the sacred one can see an obvious affinity with Ricoeur's concept of the second *naïveté*, which pushes through iconoclasm to reclaim an experience of religion as both of and not of our secular world.

Eliade sees in the nature religion that Seznec and Bush admired in Renaissance pagan literature evidence for the creation of the modern, profane world in which the forces of life itself are worshipped in a framework of immanent relations with the divine. The authentic religious experience appears in times of crisis, when the gods of this world are not enough. Eliade cites as an example of this phenomenon the ancient Hebrews turning from Yahweh to Baal and Astarte, and then back to Yahweh "under the threat of an annihilation determined

⁵⁸ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1987), 11. Further references will appear in the text.

by history” (127). The pagan deities were connected with life and the augmentation and continuation of vital functions, but they were not capable of the kind of transcendent power that resided with the “Creator Gods” (128). For Eliade, this movement is the beginning of modern religion, which is natural, secular, and devoted to the discoveries that better human life. Yet, genuine religious experience is that which reveals there to be something above life and vital functioning, and this is the realm of the religious symbol, which “conveys its message even if it is no longer *consciously* understood in every part” (129). Eliade can argue this because he, along with Ricoeur, sees the religious symbol as an intermediary, allowing access to the realm of symbols through the medium of religion, which provides the myths and stories that convey the symbols. Experience remains the measure of the sacred, because it exists outside of history, which has “not had the power to abolish” the efficacy of symbols (138). As Ricoeur put it in the essay Eliade admired in 1959, “Le symbole véritablement ouvre et découvre un domaine d'expérience” (the symbol truly opens and discovers a realm of experience).⁵⁹ Eliade recounts a conversation about theology between an American philosopher and a Shinto priest in 1958: the philosopher told the priest, named Hirai, “I see the temples, I attend the ceremonials, the dances, I admire the costumes and the courtesy of the priests—but I don’t see any theology implied by Shintoism. Hirai reflected a second and answered: We have no theology. We dance” (31). The ceremonies and rituals are not objects of a theology, a rational explanation of the interaction of the divine and the world, but are symbols functioning as intermediaries between religion and the experience of the divine.

In drawing a parallel between Seznec and Bush, and Ricoeur and Eliade, I want to emphasize how scholars have constructed paganism and its Renaissance revivals as largely

⁵⁹ Ricoeur, “Le Symbole Donne à Penser,” *Esprit* 27 7/8 (1959):
 <<http://www.fondsriceur.fr/photo/LE%20SYMBOLE%20DONNE%20A%20PENSER.pdf>>.

secular, encouraging a relationship with the divine that is not, ideally, mediated by the deceptions of allegory or the cold explanatory mechanisms of a demythologized scientific mentality. The worship of natural beauty and human life, and an eternal play of symbols, characterizes this kind of paganism and its religious myths and rituals. Eliade's and Ricoeur's phenomenological models of the sacred assume a secular realm that the sacred transforms in order to make itself known to the profane world. The natural world of human society is thus also, to return at last to Wind, the basis for the symbolic unmasking and unveiling of allegories that the historian practices in the present. This kind of hermeneutics—Ricoeur might have called it a “hermeneutics of suspicion”⁶⁰—can construct a history of the moments at which the sacred has been differentiated from the profane, as in Eliade's example of the Hebrews' vacillation between Yahweh and Baal. This kind of symbolism guards against interpreting the history of religions merely as a history of deceptions by insisting on the eternality of symbols and the fundamental identity of the natural theology and the modern explanatory force of secular philosophy.

I did not want, in recounting one line of scholarship and criticism that has influenced our conceptions of Renaissance paganism, to blunt the force of the secularist narrative of the development of myth and pagan religion in the Renaissance. This narrative has influenced a particular kind of hermeneutics of suspicion, evident in Giorgio Agamben's portrayal of the very idea of the sacred as an originally political or legal idea, whose purpose was the differentiation of natural life and the subjection of life to politically organized human power.⁶¹ For Agamben, the worship of natural forces that Eliade saw in the Hebrew worship

⁶⁰ See David Stewart, “The Hermeneutics of Suspicion,” *Literature and Theology* 3 (1989): 296–307.

⁶¹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 45–68.

of Baal is the origin of the sacred, which is a purely human concept that simultaneously protects and curses a sacrificial victim, and thus not really divisible from what we call profane. But Agamben traces this naturalistic concept of the sacred back to early pagan Rome, and the equation of pagan religion as a force that united natural life and political authority without divine mediation might as well be an extension of the Renaissance creation of a naturalistic paganism of lived experience. Agamben sees in the pagan idea of the sacred the origin of secular power's myth of social and political control, based on the divisions of natural life rather than on a myth of the unity of human and divine in the person of the ruler or in political society.⁶² However it terminates, then, the idea of a pagan natural religion continues to have explanatory force as a narrative of the history of how the secular world and its institutions evolve alongside and finally become detached from the structure of revealed religion.

I do want, however, to suggest that there are dimensions of the Renaissance engagement with pagan antiquity that this narrative does not address. The secular conception of pagan myth and religion is based on naturalism, specifically Varro's notion that the natural theology expressed the closest thing to the truth of the cosmos for the pagans, and that the Renaissance seized on precisely this aspect of pagan religion for its greatest and best expressions of its own culture. There is some truth in this, and considerable explanatory appeal: Varro himself was convinced, almost, of the self-sufficiency of the natural theology. But what about the degree to which pagan religion signified, in the Renaissance, the absurdities, errors, and fictions of false religion? Under this rubric we would find the poetic and civil theologies, discounted or suppressed even by the Renaissance mythographers

⁶² Ibid., 57–58.

themselves, no less than modern critics who were interested in the construction of the secular space of imaginative literature and political culture.

The countervailing formalism to which a consideration of the poetic/civil theologies might lead was, nevertheless, a necessary topic of discussion for Renaissance mythographers, scholars, and artists. I use “formalism” here to mean the idea that symbols themselves have no *eternal* truth but whose value is determined by the form in which they are represented. But the implications of seeing all artistic representations not as eternally authentic symbols but as self-conscious fictions were troubling. To admit as much would be to see all religions as based on the fictions of representation rather than on natural life or historically contingent symbols. In this interpretation, religion and its myths become the kind of secret philosophy that Seznec lamented and which Bush attributed to ignorance, the opposite of a natural religion of lived experience. But of course many in the Renaissance thought that pagan religions were not really nature religions so much as they were based on fictions of nature. This is a very powerful idea and one that could potentially be applied to *any* religion or even any social or political structure.

The modern apostle of this kind of theological-political formalism is Leo Strauss. He illuminates a certain strand of religious thought that is important to recognize in the Renaissance relationship to ancient religion and its fictions. In “The Problem of Socrates” (1970), Strauss describes a situation recognizable from Seznec and the narrative of secular paganism: the divisions of nature as the key to religious experience. Only, Strauss emphasizes not the experiential force of natural life but its tendency to serve as a basis for the fictions and “fundamental untruth” upon which political life is founded. This untruth is based on two things, Strauss argues. The first is “the replacement of the earth as the common

mother of all men, and therewith of the fraternity of all men, by a part of the earth, the land, the fatherland, the territory, and the fraternity of only the fellow citizens.” The second part of the untruth “consists in ascribing divine origin to the existing social hierarchy, or, more generally stated, in identifying the existing social hierarchy with the natural hierarchy; that is to say, even the polis according to nature is not simply natural.”⁶³ The problem, as Strauss expresses it, is that for the Greeks religion must conflict with nature, knowledge of which was called “philosophy” among the ancients.

He sees evidence for this conflict between religion and philosophy in Hegel, who characterized Greek religion as an “art-religion” in his *Philosophy of Spirit*, by which he meant a religion that exists within the fictional confines of ritual and human subjectivity. The problem for Strauss is that when the art religion bases its fictions on natural knowledge it must conflict with political authority. The reason is that natural theology provided the truth behind the fictions of the poets and civic leaders, but could not be widely known. Strauss sees the kind of individualism that the natural theology promotes as a symptom of political corruption. Hegel’s “art-religion” was the basis for later conceptions of the pagan revival of the Renaissance as a kind of natural religion that ended in the glorification of the individual as the possessor of knowledge about the beauty and immediacy of natural life. But for Strauss, the dilemma becomes one of squaring philosophy with politics, for “philosophy does not have a political or civic existence” (118). Strauss argues that Hegel had glossed over the degree to which the artistic liberation of the individual in Greek religion was based on the possession of natural knowledge, and that Hegel did not recognize the importance of the idea that fictions were simply fictions and not expressive of a deeper kind of naturalism. Fictions,

⁶³ Strauss, “The Problem of Socrates: Five Lectures,” in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss*, ed. Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 158. Further references will appear in the text.

not nature, Strauss would argue, form the basis of all religions and thus political life. This Hegelian mistake might be extended, if one were to agree with Strauss, to the later scholars of Renaissance naturalism.

Strauss's thought shows the clear line from certain Platonic ideas of politics and religion down to the Stoic theologies of Varro. For Strauss, religion cannot be natural, because it has its origins in the fictional; it is inextricably bound up with the necessity of the "noble lie" (160) for creating political life. He did find something to like in Hegel's idea of the "art religion," which sees religion as a way to manage human relationships. But Strauss sees the claims of transcendence and subjective liberation in the art-religion as based, problematically, on natural knowledge, which has no political existence. So, to relate to others on a political level, one must view religion not as composed of inward knowledge but of outward-looking fictions and representations. Strauss argues that this is what Plato means in his allegory of the cave:

According to Herodotus, Homer and Hesiod created what we could call Greek religion. Plato has expressed this thought as clearly as he could in his simile of the cave. The cave-dwellers, that is to say, we humans, see nothing other, that is to say, nothing higher, than shadows of artifacts, especially of reproductions of men and other living beings moving around on high. We do not see the human beings who make and carry these artifacts. But as is shown clearly by Plato's demand for the noble delusion, he himself is far from disapproving altogether of the poet's activity. In principle the poets do exactly the same thing as Plato himself. (179)

What, then, are the symbols of the Greek religion but the shadows and reproductions of men? The point is extendable to the very idea of religion, which must perforce be a collection of fictions and representations, created by poets. But as Strauss is at pains to emphasize, Plato's anxious discussions of poets and poetry underscores the reliance of the legislator on a certain kind of poetic creation, a self-conscious manipulation of the ideas belonging to men and the

city. Poetry is intimately allied with the legislator for Plato, and his denigration of poetry speaks to the impracticality of natural philosophy. But ultimately, argues Strauss, poetry *is* the Platonic philosophy because this philosophy is concerned not only with nature but with the movements of the soul beyond nature. This is formalism applied to politics and religion, wherein the forms of poetic fictions, the very fact of their being representations of mutable human psychology and motivations, undergird the political function of religion itself.

I cite Strauss simply to argue that his theological-political philosophy might provide a way to complicate our reading of the Renaissance engagement with pagan religion and its literary myths. However, Strauss's work is not a perfect model. He is utterly contemptuous of materialist philosophy and its historical influence. And he does not give much attention to the idea that religious fiction and poetry could create universally valid symbols whose histories are recoverable as evidence for the continual interactions of the sacred and the profane. Not this, for Strauss: he decried the materialist philosophy of liberalism as erasing distinctions of good and bad; in seeking to historicize religious phenomena especially, he argued, one would have to know the "nature of God," and "natural theology is the technical name for that" (267).

However, Renaissance mythographers took natural theology very seriously, and they also often perceive a fundamental unity of religions in linguistic and natural symbols. But we also see in them an incisive critique of pagan religions as religions of fiction, and the constant, almost obsessive worry that such fictions represent the political and popular foundations of all religions. One has to wait for Spinoza for a well-argued, optimistic interpretation of the drive to historicize religious revelation, but one can find a multitude of examples that this problem informed so many of the writers who bent their minds to the

renewal or revival of paganism and the attendant problem of religious relativism. Ultimately, Renaissance authors provide both support for and a critique of Strauss's notions of religious representation as political philosophy. In fact, as I will argue in the proceeding chapters the Renaissance discourse of false religion provides a way to complicate our own understandings of the relationship between art, religion, and the state. The place of pagan myths and religions in particular, concepts that were at times both reviled and revered, reveals the continual readjustments between literary fiction and its religious and political effects.

Chapter 2

Arthur Golding and the Interpretation of Paganism in Elizabethan England

This chapter is about the role of paganism in the religious conflicts of Elizabethan England, as seen through the eyes of Arthur Golding and his translations, especially that of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. More generally, though, it is about the interpretive strategies of conciliation and accommodation that responded to foreign or heretical religious practices in this period. Rather than focus on one or two specific heresies or pagan religious practices, I take as my purpose the construction of an intellectual history of the early-Elizabethan response to foreign religions, especially of the classical world, from a wide variety of sources that Golding and his circle would have known and studied. Golding forms the center of the chapter because he and his version of Ovid were deeply enmeshed in the struggle to define Protestantism for England in the mid-sixteenth century. His protean translating acumen often aligned him with competing paradigms of religious identity, but it is precisely this competition and struggle to define one's identity against and through the assimilation of foreign, unfamiliar practices that characterizes Golding's Protestantism and that of his circle. This chapter locates itself within familiar debates over the proper role of tradition in religious worship, the employment of ceremonies, and the possibility of interaction with unbelievers. At the same time, it argues that reading the interplay between pagan religious practices and Christian ones provided a way for English readers to interpret the conflicting religious disciplines that resulted from the proliferation of Protestant ideologies. It also argues that this

method of reading laid the groundwork for later models of confronting the diversity of religious practices.

Arthur Golding had a well-connected circle of friends, family, and patrons. He and his family associated with, and married, some of the wealthiest, most powerful, and most influential people in the church and government of Elizabethan England. His half-sister Margery married John de Vere, sixteenth earl of Oxford. Henry, his brother, became the steward of the earl's household in 1553 and was elected to Parliament in 1558. Edward de Vere, the seventeenth earl, was Arthur Golding's nephew; the young earl was also the ward of William Cecil, to whom Golding had strong ties, translating for him and often residing at his house.

As a prolific translator, Golding's works necessarily reflect the ecclesiastical, political, and cultural turmoil negotiated by the Elizabethan governing classes. In this chapter I discuss his translation of the *Metamorphoses* and its place in English religious culture. I focus on the interpretive strategies—which Golding outlines in the prefaces and represents in the stories themselves—for confronting and converting the pagan religions that the poem portrays. These strategies in his prefaces are specifically designed to take into account the poem's paganism, to turn it into something useful for Ovid's Christian readers. The religious literature of this period is filled with references to “heathens,” “infidels,” and “gentiles,” sometimes referring to contemporary Catholics or radicals but just as often to the pagans of the past and present. The reformers so often discussed the early church as a paragon of organization that the problems of the early church to assimilate unbelievers similarly came to the fore in sixteenth-century England. Golding's religious translations display an awareness of the problem of allowing ceremonies, of maintaining the decorum of worship in the face of

aesthetic temptation, and of incorporating differing religious practices and beliefs into one coherent system. As it turned out, Golding's interpretive theory is quite personal and individualistic, rooted in the specifics of bodily exchange, digestion, assimilation, and change, appropriately enough for a poem that emphasizes the continual physical changes that characterize pagan religious devotion.

By 1567, Golding had developed a network of patrons sympathetic to his own views of religious community. He dedicated his translation of Leonardo Bruni's work on the expulsion of the Goths to William Cecil in 1563, and his translation of Trogus Pompeius's history to Cecil's ward, Edward de Vere, in 1564. Cecil asked Golding to complete a translation of Julius Caesar's commentaries, which he did in 1565. Also in 1565 he dedicated the translation of the first four books of the *Metamorphoses* to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. From his dedications, we can track Golding's residences in these early years of his career as a translator. He lived at Cecil's house on the Strand in London in 1563, and probably continued living there sporadically for the next four years. His translation of Caesar was dedicated from "Powles Belchamp," the town where Golding was born, in East Anglia.

In 1566 and 1567, Golding was translating in "Barwicke," an estate owned by the de Vere family in White Colne, Essex, about fourteen miles from his native town of Belchamp St. Paul. His translation of the complete *Metamorphoses* did not, as is sometimes argued, cleanly mark the end of his classical translations and the beginning of his period of religious translations. He translated a short work by John Calvin on "Offences" in 1566 and dedicated it to Francis Russell, Earl of Bedford, member of the privy council, and "Governour of Barwicke." Russell was charged with the governorship of the Northern town of Berwick because he was the liaison between Elizabeth and Mary Queen of Scots during the former's

attempts to marry the latter to someone in the English court (possibly Robert Dudley).⁶⁴ The homonymous relationship between Golding's place of residence and the residence of his dedicatee purposely underscores Golding's sympathy for the religious views of the distant earl.⁶⁵

Golding's religious convictions in the late 1560s and early '70s are difficult to pin down with any precision. Nevertheless, it is clear that we must do away with the term "puritan" once and for all, and perhaps even the blanket term "Protestant" as well. While he was certainly a Protestant, what kind was he? The prolific translator of Calvin also translated Lutheran and Philippist authors such as David Chytraeus and Neils Hemmingsen. How closely did he follow the Protestant infighting in Germany after Luther's death? How committed was he to Geneva and its doctrines and discipline? In the years between 1567 and 1570, Golding translated Calvin, Ovid, Chytraeus, and Hemmingsen. The reasons were partly economic and partly ideological, which suggests that Golding was no firm partisan of any one Protestant sect. The questions are complicated further by Golding's patrons and

⁶⁴ Records of Russell's activities in the north, including his back and forth negotiations with Mary, may be found in J. H. Wiffen, *Historical Memoirs of the House of Russell from the Time of the Norman Conquest*, 2 vols. (London, 1833), 1:442–77.

⁶⁵ The fact that Golding dedicates his translation to the governor of "Barwicke" and lists his residence as "Barwicke" has caused some confusion. The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* states that Golding's "Barwicke" refers to the castle in Essex, following Golding's biographer Louis Thorn Golding (*An Elizabethan Puritan: Arthur Golding the Translator of Ovid's "Metamorphoses" and also of John Calvin's "Sermons"* [New York: Richard R. Smith, 1937], 59). However, the original *Dictionary of National Biography* conjectured that Golding had visited Berwick in the north from 1566–67, and some scholars agree (see H. S. Bennett, *English Books & Readers, 1558 to 1603: Being a Study in the History of the Book Trade in the Reign of Elizabeth I* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965], 107). Golding also dedicated his translation of Ovid in 1567 from "Barwicke," but it seems unlikely that he would have travelled so far from his friends and family, especially since his brother-in-law, the earl of Essex, owned a castle called "Barwicke" in White Colne. Besides, the historical record makes no mention of Golding accompanying Francis Russell to the north. Nevertheless, it is possible that Golding was in the north with Russell, as the dates of Golding's translations from "Barwicke," October 1566 and April 1567, do correspond to the earl's appointment in Berwick. It seems clear that, no matter his residence, Golding was sympathetic to Russell's positions. I have chosen to follow Louis Thorn Golding, but the question will remain provocative.

dedicatees, who, like the earl of Bedford, also patronized and read the works of exiled Italian reformers in England.

The earl was a devotee of many Italian reformers that were popular in England in the 1560s (due in large part to the earl's patronage), among them Bernardo Ochino and Peter Martyr Vermigli; the latter gained a lectureship at Oxford through the earl's influence and was eventually given patronage by Robert Dudley as well. Russell's books were catalogued in 1584, and his shelves were even then lined with the Italian reformers he had been acquainted with in the '50s and '60s.⁶⁶ Another author prominent on his shelf was Jacob Aconcio, the author of *Satan's Stratagems*, a work urging unity and peace among competing sects. Aconcio also dedicated a treatise on history to Robert Dudley, who became his patron in 1564, shortly before Aconcio's death. Golding's introduction to his translation of Calvin's treatise seems tailored to the earl's interest in the Italian reformers, Aconcio especially (though he does not mention him by name). Golding writes that "Sathan by all meanes séeketh in stayinge the sincere preachinge of Gods most holy woorde, to scatter the people into sectes & Scismes."⁶⁷ Aconcio's ideas were not of the mainstream in England, and so he published his book in Basel in 1565, but nonetheless his notion of a diverse and wide-ranging religious liberty had much in common with other works floating around the Leicester and Bedford circles.

⁶⁶ For Russell's books, see Anne Overell, *Italian Reform and English Reformations, c.1535–c.1585* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 200–201.

⁶⁷ John Calvin, *A Little Booke of Iohn Caluines Concernynge Offences whereby at this Daye Diuers are Feared, and many also Quight Withdrawen from the Pure Doctrine of the Gospell*, trans. Arthur Golding (London, 1567), sig. *br.

Aconcio believed in diversity and liberty of religious opinion, which, perhaps counter-intuitively, promotes religious unity as dissenting ideas are tested and the best come to the forefront. He writes,

Ac illud quidem occurrit primum, quod, si integrum sit cuique, quam maxime velit religionem colere ac tueri, cum maxima sit ingeniorum iudiciorumque diversitas, fiet, ut opinionum sententiarumque permagna etiam sit diversitas, utque nemo non habeat, qui ab se dissentiat sibiue contradicat; cumque nemini propemodum non contradicatur, necesse fuerit multos in dubium venire, quid potissimum probent sequanturque. Qui dubitat autem, is ad veri inquisitionem extimulatur, et multis inquirentibus mirum, ni aliquis invenerit; inventa porro veritate si disserendi sit libertas, facta sententiarum collatione, illa superior evadat necesse est. Ex quo quidem efficitur cum opinionum de religione libertate consistere Satanae regnum diu non posse.⁶⁸

[It happens first, indeed, that if there is a wholehearted desire in each person that religion may be fully protected and observed, and when there is a great diversity of minds and judgments, then it will come about that there will be a huge diversity in opinions and ideas, so that everyone has someone who will dissent from his opinion and contradict him; and whenever there is pretty much always someone to contradict another, necessarily many are thrown into doubt as to what they should approve and follow above all else. But he who doubts is goaded to search for the truth, and with many such seekers it would be amazing if the truth were not found; if the truth is at last reached with a freedom of discussion, and with a joining of ideas, then the highest truth will come to the fore. From which it certainly comes about that when there is a freedom of opinions about religion, then the kingdom of Satan cannot stand for long.]

Aconcio imagines an ideal religious community in which contradictory opinions are eventually strained out and the truth emerges only after free discussion (“disserendi . . . libertas”). And yet, conflicting opinions could lead to sectarianism if there is no liberty of discussion, that is, if each conflicting opinion is hardened into institutional dogmatism. Just a few lines later he concedes that this great quantity of dissenting opinions often provides occasions to remove religious liberty and unite it under a false unity. The problem often lies with “institutions” that propagate corrupt doctrines as if they were pure ones. Good

⁶⁸ Aconcio, *Stratagematum Satanae Libri VIII*, ed. Giorgio Radetti (following the 1565 Basel edition) (Florence: Vallecchi Editore, 1946), 412. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

contention is distinguished from bad contention in that the good kind rests with individuals seeking after the truth among conflicting opinions; whereas the bad kind originates with individuals struggling under laws and institutions that create competing sects that canonize their narrow, partial truths.

Francis Russell knew the kinds of conflict caused by institutional religious warfare firsthand. He was exiled to Venice and then Zurich during Mary's rule, and was assigned to deal with the religio-political maneuvering that came about from Mary Queen of Scots' claim to the English throne. The occasion for Golding's translation was not only Bedford's mission in the north but also the recently concluded Council of Trent, wherein, to Golding's eyes, the very height of institutional error had been perpetuated. "It is not unknown," he writes, "what hath bene concluded in the Councell of Trent . . . what pollicies, what practises bothe at home, and abroad, have bene, and are dayly put in execution, to hinder the course of the Gospell."⁶⁹ Calvin praises the Italian reformers in his book: "whom," he asks, "shall the Italians set against *Bernardine Ochine*, or *Peter Vermill*?"⁷⁰ His book would have appealed to Bedford because of Calvin's ideas of how the gospel should be spread, and the pitfalls of such evangelism. Just as Bedford sought to expand the true religion to Scotland, the apostle Paul had sought to expand and unify the extent of Christendom. But offences went with him: "when Paule was goynge of his harde souldierfare in countries farre of: when through a thousande daungers he endeouored to enlarge the kingdome of Christe: hauinge continuall conflictcs with sundry enemies, runnyng hither and thither of purpose & desire to gather nations farre distant asunder, into the vnitie of the faith: cowardly and currish whisperers

⁶⁹ Calvin, *Concerning Offences*, trans. Golding, sigs. *iiir–v.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, fol. 79v.

burdened him behinde his backe with vnderdeserued slaunders.”⁷¹ In the New Testament, Paul often intends the word *skandalon* (“offence” or “stumbling block”) to represent the inflexibility of opinions hardened by institutional tradition.⁷² Though they both excoriated institutionalized customs, Calvin’s treatise was certainly more mainstream’s than Aconcio’s book. Nevertheless, each portrays an ideal Christian reader, and preacher, who remains constant and is able to see his way through the external trappings of different viewpoints to the truth behind them.

This urgent conception of the hindrances that might keep people from the faith also informs Golding’s translation in 1569 of Niels Hemmingsen’s “Postil,” an explication of gospel passages commonly recited in churches. Hemmingsen himself was a follower of Melancthon, and his postil reflects the Philippists’ concern for conciliation and harmony among competing sects.⁷³ The title page provides a “warning . . . to the Ministers of Gods word . . . least any beeing offended at the varietie of opinions and multitude of sects, might eyther forsake their profession, or do their duetie more slouthfully.”⁷⁴ “Offence” typically springs up, Hemmingsen suggests, when there are multiple ways of worshipping, or multiple ways of conceiving some aspect of devotion. Feast days were especially tricky; he writes, “It is necessarie that wée bée put in minde what things are too bée considered in euery seuerall feast, least either with the wicked and Heathenish world we abuse them too the dishonor of God, or else solemnize them with lesse deuotion than it béecommeth vs, not without the

⁷¹ Ibid., fol. 83r.

⁷² See, for example, Galatians 5:11: “And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased.” All biblical citations are from the Geneva Bible.

⁷³ See Robert E. Stillman, *Philip Sidney and the Poetics of Renaissance Cosmopolitanism* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 9.

⁷⁴ Hemmingsen, *A Postil, or Exposition of the Gospels that are Usually Read in the Churches of God, upon the Sundayes and Feast Dayes of Saintes*, trans. Golding (London, 1569).

offence of many.”⁷⁵ As is the case with many of Golding’s translations from this period, the reconciliation of diverging opinions, and practices, proves the best way to avoid the bogey of “offence.” The translation of Hemmingsen also has a practical bent that can be attributed to the circumstances in which it came about. The prolific printers Lucas Harrison and George Bishop essentially commissioned it and a second volume of postils a year later, because they saw the market for works that would help the faithful navigate the contemporary maze of religious sects and practices.⁷⁶

Before he translated Hemmingsen’s thoughts on feasts, though, Golding worried that his translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* might also provide an occasion for offence. In the epistle to Leicester, Golding asks that his readers not “offend / At vices in this present woork in lyvely colours pend” (420–21).⁷⁷ The threat of offense goes hand in hand with the threat of infection; his prefatory materials are his guard against the infection that the pagan text might spread among the faithful. And yet, Golding is also persistent in his belief that the text offers something important for his readers: a method of discrimination between the true and the false, and a method of putting to good use material that at first glance seems to present a conflict to the believing mind.

Golding likes to imagine the text as being both something to encounter visually, perhaps not surprisingly, but also as something to be confronted, converted, ingested, and processed. The fact that Golding employed this language tells us something important about how the pagan world, and indeed other cultures whose values might conflict with those of

⁷⁵ Ibid., fols. 1r–v.

⁷⁶ See Bennett, *English Books & Readers, 1558 to 1603*, 107–8.

⁷⁷ I cite Golding’s translation by page number from *Ovid’s “Metamorphoses,” the Arthur Golding Translation 1567*, ed. John Frederick Nims (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2000).

Golding's and his contemporaries, was experienced and conceived by Tudor writers. Golding used the recent and continuing controversies and conflicts within Protestantism in order to articulate his vision of the ideal imbiber of Ovid and the pagan world. He refers to the controversy, only recently hatched in print, over vestments and outerwear in church services; he brings up the wide-ranging Protestant debate about what kinds of food are permissible to eat; and throughout he is attentive to the way that pagan religion forms a necessary link between the moral, physical, disciplinary side of religious belief and the god-given spirit and grace that allow the Christian believer to contextualize ritual behaviors within a narrative of salvation.

Golding's Calvinism and his translations of Calvin provide a philosophical and theological key that will help to explain Renaissance interpretations of pagan mythology and religions.⁷⁸ Even though Golding, his patrons, and his dedicatees were not always strict Calvinists, nevertheless the stage must be set by a brief discussion of the French theologian himself and the interpretive problems presented by his theology. John Calvin often interprets "heathen" customs and religion as just one way that the inborn natural propensity for worshipping God has been corrupted. Calvin, like many other theologians, maintained that in terms of our physical natures, all humans are the same. But this physical sameness is actually a curse, rather than a basis for agreement: "as in respect of our first creation, there is no difference betwene the Iewes, the Turks, the Heathen men, & vs. Wee are al of vs taken out of one Lump, wee are al the children of Adam, yea wee are all heyres of Gods wrath, and cursed by nature."⁷⁹ This same curse that makes us more like animals than men, according to

⁷⁸ For a similar approach to methodology, see Gary G. Gibbs and Florinda Ruiz, "Arthur Golding's *Metamorphoses*: Myth in an Elizabethan Political Context," *Renaissance Studies* 22 (2008): 557–75.

Calvin, also has the effect of creating and maintaining superstitions that are derived from the pleasures of feeding the body. Through custom, what was common to everyone came to substitute for the unseen power that was only evident, or revealed, to a few. The common physical nature of all men thus invalidated historically grounded rituals and ceremonies that had long been tools of education, among pagans and Catholics alike.⁸⁰ Where Calvin's Catholic enemies identified a continuous and dialectical progression of ceremony and belief toward modern Catholic practices, Calvin maintained the eternal struggle of the wise elect against the superstitious vulgar.⁸¹

These diverging interpretations of the ancient past show up frequently in the 1560s. That decade saw a protracted debate between John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury, and Thomas Harding, an English Catholic forced into retirement in Louvain. The subject of this particular episode was the views of the primitive church toward communion and the sacraments. The early church obviously had to differentiate its rituals from those of pagans. In an extended discussion of the nature of the sacraments, Harding adduces Augustine's claim that pagans mistook Christian sacraments for the worship of Bacchus and Ceres (wine and bread), "Whereof may iustly be gathered an argument, that in those daies faithful people worshipped the Bodie, and Bloud of Christe in the Sacrament, vnder the Formes of Breade, and Wine. For els the Infidels could not haue suspected them, of dooinge Idolatrie to Bacchus, and Ceres." Harding assumes, logically, that early Christian ritual must have looked much like pagan rituals. Jewel, however, has something else in mind:

⁷⁹ Calvin, *The Sermons of M. Iohn Caluin, upon the Epistle of S. Paule too the Ephesians*, trans. Arthur Golding (London, 1577), fol. 77r.

⁸⁰ See, for instance, Natale Conti's discussion of the value of Roman temples, public ceremonies, and images for modern-day believers in his *Mythologiae*, ed. and trans. John Mulryan and Steven Brown, 2 vols. (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), 1:13.

⁸¹ David Weil Baker has noted that those urging conformity with the "ecclesiastical status quo" often looked to the ancient past to defend contemporary practices ("'Dealt with at his owne weapon': Anti-Antiquarianism in Milton's Prelacy Tracts," *Studies in Philology* 106 [2009]: 207–34, qtn. on 210).

For the very children in Grammar Schooles can tel him, that the Heathens, that Adoured Bacchus, and Ceres, as their Goddes, yet notwithstandinge neuer gaue godly honour to Breade, and Wyne. And Cicero him selfe, beinge an Heathen, was hable to say, *Quis tam stultus est, vt id, quo vescitur, credat esse Deum?* Who is so very a foole, that wil beleeeue, the thinge, that he eateth, to be his God?⁸²

Both disputants claim continuity with the pagans, but they go about it in radically different ways. Harding argues that pagans saw numinous qualities in the food and drink produced by the gods, while Jewel thinks that the pagans were guided more by natural reason, though still deficient in its ignorance of grace, and that they never actually believed gods were in their cups and on their plates. Jewel's thesis was influenced by Calvin's conception of the natural reason of the pagans that could carry them a long way toward virtue. But Harding assumes that religious rituals have continuity along a historical spectrum, with only the intentions and the salvation status of the participants changed. On the other hand, Jewel quotes a learned Roman to describe pagan religious practices. The two sides of this debate are replicated over and over during the 1560s and 70s, with moderates often espousing a view of continuity similar to Harding's; eventually Presbyterians such as Cartwright would quote Jewel approvingly when he wrote of the complete separation of the disciplines of Christians and Gentiles.

Golding's own position, to judge from his translations, migrated during these years. Part of Ovid's appeal for Golding was that the Roman poet could provide a critique of the historical origins of religious rituals; but at the same time, Ovid's poem often sees the value of ritual in sustaining civic religion. The reader thus stands in a peculiar place in Golding's prefaces, caught between Golding's prefaces and Ovid's own complicated poem. Golding creates, and does not fully resolve, a tension between the "simple sort" that might get the

⁸² Jewel, *A Replie vnto M. Hardinges Answere* (London, 1565), 406.

wrong idea from Ovid and the learned reader who has the ability to put Ovid's stories to good use. But Golding also wants to make an ideal reader who exists between the two. Just how the pagan world, and indeed all those of different beliefs, might be of use to Protestant Englishmen, was a question with a complicated answer.

It might be contextualized partially in the familiar dynamic of flesh and spirit in which paganism was decidedly a fleshly sort of belief. But physical infection and degeneration was seen as a common threat posed by unbelievers, even those long dead like the classical authors. Golding portrays in his prefaces a variety of readers who are variously susceptible to the infection of aberrant religious practices and beliefs. The dynamic was further complicated because the healthy Protestant had to expose himself to others and had to exercise his mind and body in a constant struggle to maintain the internal form of true religion.⁸³

Max Weber long ago linked Protestantism to earlier ascetic religious thought that emphasized the necessity of training, exercise, and variety in forming and maintaining belief.⁸⁴ Weber identifies a complicated tension within the reformed religions of northern Europe that informs my own study. According to him, as the sacraments were rejected, rejection of worldly concerns went hand in hand. And yet, he notes that "the long-term endurance of scripture as manifest in the daily lives of the faithful" was the most important corollary to such a rejection of sacramental "magic." The test of an individual's faith thus fell into the world and into the management of worldly concerns. As some eventually argued, the

⁸³ On the religious polemic circling around the loaded terms "flesh" and "spirit," see especially Achsah Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community from Herbert to Milton: Literature, Religion, and Cultural Conflict in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), chap. 2.

⁸⁴ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, with Other Writings on the Rise of the West*, 4th ed., trans. Stephen Kalberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 101–60.

“inner light” of “continuing revelation” manifest in nature could actually produce salvation for those who had never known the “biblical form of revelation.”⁸⁵ The liberty of conscience so important for many Protestants was often accompanied by a profound concern for the materials of everyday existence; in fact, these materials gained a religious component as well, as Christians found salvific significance in what they ate, how they cared for their bodies, and what they read, not because of external authority but because of their own consciences.

More recently, Michael Schoenfeldt has argued persuasively that regimens of dietary control often governed not only physical but also ethical and moral conceptions of the self. The early modern world, he argues, found in regimes of self-control a way to liberate the individual to take in, change, and assimilate the great variety of the external world that might disagree and conflict with an individual’s religious beliefs or received ideas. The stomach, in particular, was crucial for Golding as a Protestant thinker concerned with the relationship between Christians and the pagans of Ovid’s culture and poem. Schoenfeldt believes that “the stomach is at the center of an organic system demanding perpetual osmosis with the outside world.”⁸⁶ Furthermore, and importantly, “the stomach . . . supervises the necessary discrimination of edible from inedible matter, a discrimination that is ethical as well as physiological.”⁸⁷ I would add that this discrimination is also trans-cultural. Golding, as we will see, liked to imagine the reader as a consumer, taking in foreign matter and converting it into usable nutrient. The consumer, however, is changed by the encounter, and the very

⁸⁵ Ibid., 135.

⁸⁶ Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 13.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 31.

process develops into an indispensable way for Protestants to experience paganism and come out stronger. Golding is joined by classical authorities (Seneca, Galen) as well as Christian (St. Paul), but his interpretive paradigm is, I will show, thoroughly embedded in the needs and obsessions of his immediate cultural milieu.

Golding's Protestantism, and that of many of his contemporaries, was characterized by doubt in the face of conflicting opinions, sects, and disciplines. Accordingly, Golding's language overflows with metaphors and images of religious differences that emphasize the process of spiritual growth, especially the processes of digestive conversion and assimilation that could be located in and on the frail, mutable bodies both of his Protestant readers and of his mythological subjects. Indeed, in his prefaces Golding often returns to the theme of the fallibility of the body and its senses in order to suggest the difficulty of converting, and translating, pagan culture into Christian culture. The sense of sight seems especially vulnerable in the epistle to Leicester. The pagan poets "shadow" the truth of scripture with their "gloses." The job of the translator and reader is to pluck the clear truth from the darkened version of it. He writes,

Behold, by sent of reason and by perfect syght I fynd
A Panther heere, whose peinted cote with yellow spots like gold
And pleasant smell allure myne eyes and senses to behold.
But well I know his face is grim and fearce, which he dooth hyde
To this intent, that while I thus stand gazing on his hyde,
He may devour mee unbewares. Ne let them more offend
At vices in this present work in lyvley colours pend,
Than if that in a chrySTALL glasse fowle images they found,
Resembling folkes fowle visages that stand about it round.

(420–21)

Golding argues that pagan culture distorts the truth but that it is dangerous because it is arresting, even sublime. The Christian reader reads at a remove from the pagan world, though. He sees the mirror from a distance, and the figures reflected in it are those of the

pagans, their own faces distorted by vice. But the pagan mysteries are also beautiful and enticing, like the golden panther, which represents the pleasures of idolatry and the senses. The pagan world needs to be converted, translated, pacified, and even transubstantiated in order for it to be useful to Christians.

So, Golding introduces another set of metaphors at the end of his epistle. He describes Ovid's poem as

This worthy worke in which of good examples are so many,
This Ortyard of Alcinous in which there wants not any
Herb, tree, or frute that may mans use for health or pleasure serve,
This plenteous horne of Acheloy which justly dooth deserve
To beare the name of tresorie of knowledge.

(421)

Again, he hopes that “every wyght that shall have pleasure for to sport / Him in this gardeine, may as well beare wholesome frute away / As only on the pleasant flowres his rechlesse senses stay” (421–22). The text becomes food to be consumed and processed, for health as well as pleasure. The variety represented in the readers' gardens is also the variety that the Christian man has liberty to enjoy.

This liberty was an essential part of Golding's interpretive strategy in the prefaces, and reveals what was at stake in that strategy. In the preface “To the Reader” (first published in 1565), Golding writes of how superstition took over the world after the Fall and drove men to worship God's creatures instead of him: “The which by custome taking roote, and growing so to strength, / Through Sathans help possest the hartes of all the world at length” (423). This was a commonplace of Protestant reactions to other religions, especially those of the new world. Richard Eden wrote an introduction to his translation of Peter Martyr Anghiera's *De Orbe Novo*, in which he writes that everyone can agree that the conversion of the natives is a good thing:

I thinke then no trewe Chrystian men that do not reioyce with the Angels of heauen for the deliuerie of these owre brootherne, owre flesshe, and owre bones, from the handes of owre commune enemie the oulde serpente who hath so longe had them in hys possession, vntyll the fulnesse of the gentyles be accomplysshed accordynge to the time prefinite by hym.⁸⁸

Here too it seems that the natives share a common humanity with Christians, except that tradition, the “oulde serpente,” has corrupted their good qualities. Golding, too, acknowledges the mutability of custom in his prefaces and its deleterious effect on the pagans, but it is important that the source of corruption is not the pagans’ souls; rather, tradition has corrupted them instead. Logically, if the Indians could be converted, so too could the classical pagans, *post factum*. The gods in the *Metamorphoses* are decidedly mutable objects of devotion, but they can serve as a touchstone for “righteous” religious devotion in those who know how to interpret them. After giving a brief list of what the major gods represent, Golding writes, “I knowe theis names to other thinges oft may and must agree / In declaration of the which I will not tedious bee, / But leave them to the Readers will to take in sundry wyse, / As matter rysing giveth cause constructions to devyse” (424). Despite Golding’s provision of specific moral interpretation in the prefaces, these lines give license to the reader to apply his own interpretations to the stories. And as the subject matter becomes more difficult, the interpretation should become more complex as well. As he writes in the epistle to Leicester, even though he provides some examples of specific interpretations, he has not added “curiously the meaning of them all, / For that were labor infinite” (414). For Golding, the pagan religions themselves are difficult because they are mutable, various, and copious, like the human body, a “lumpe of flesh and bones” (ibid.) all jumbled together.

⁸⁸ Anghiera, *The Decades of the Newe Worlde or West India Conteynyng the Nauigations and Conquestes of the Spanyardes*, trans. Richard Eden (London, 1555), sig. [aiiir].

This variety can be helpful to the Christian reader who knows how to interpret it. In fact, the variety of rituals and encounters with different opinions are necessary for the Protestant reader. Golding actively encourages the experience of cultural transformation and assimilation, illustrating the principle with a familiar metaphor. In his preface to the reader he writes,

Then take theis woorkes as fragrant flowers most full of pleasant juce,
The which the Bee conveying home may put to wholesome use:
And which the spyder sucking on to poison may convert,
Through venym spred in all her limbes and native in her hart.
(427)

The bee goes out into the garden and chooses from among the variety there, while the spider sits at home on her web, rotten to the core. Golding was accessing a long tradition of classical thought that recommended just this variety of reading, learning, and travelling among competing ideas and cultures. In his eighty-fourth epistle, for example, Seneca writes about the necessity to read widely and to assimilate that reading into a coherent whole: “Interchangeable this is to be exchanged with that, and the one is to be moderated with the other; so that whatsoever is gathered together by reading, the pen may reduce into a bodie. We ought, as they say, to imitate Bees, which wander up and downe, and picke fit flowers to make honie.”⁸⁹ Seneca goes on to compare this process of selective interpretation to bodily digestion:

Nourishment which we have taken, so long as it abideth in quality, and swimmeth solid in the stomacke is a burthen; but when it is changed from that which it was, then at length it passeth into strength and into blood. The same let us doe in these things wherewith wits are nourished: that whatsoever wee have gotten, we suffer not to be whole, nor to be other mens. Let us concoct them, otherwise they will go into the memory, not into the wit. Let us

⁸⁹ Seneca, *The Workes of Lucius Annaeus Seneca, both Morall and Naturall*, trans. Thomas Lodge (London, 1614), 348.

faithfully agree unto them, and make them ours, that one certaine may be made of many things.⁹⁰

Seneca uses the medical language of authors such as Galen in order to compare what goes on in the stomach to what must happen to the imbibor of ideas. The important point for Seneca and for Golding is that the stomach and the bee take what they find and somehow make a single, coherent thing out of the variety of materials they gather.

Golding also mixes Galenic medical discourse with biblical aphorism to explain the model of interpretation he envisions. He sets up a division between those who are able to process pagan culture and those who are not:

For to the pure and Godly mynd, are all things pure and cleene,
And unto such as are corrupt the best corrupted beene:
Lyke as the finest meates and drinkes that can bee made by art
In sickly folks to nourishment of sicknesse doo convert.
And therefore not regarding such whose dyet is so fyne
That nothing can digest with them onlesse it bee devine,
Nor such as to theyr proper harme doo wrest and wring awrye
The thinges that to a good intent are written pleasantly,
Through Ovids woorke of turned shapes I have painfull pace
Past on untill I had atteyned the end of all my race.

(427)

Golding quotes from Titus 1:15, “to the pure, all things are pure,” in order to make a distinction between the clean and unclean. But it is unclear exactly how the rest of this extended metaphor is supposed to apply to text and readers. Is Ovid’s text one of the “best” that are corrupted by the corrupt? Does the poem correspond to the “finest meates and drinkes that can bee made by art”? This would certainly invalidate Golding’s claim that pagan poets made their poetry by distorting and twisting God’s truth. But on the other hand, Golding does say that Ovid’s poem is not “devine” and thus he is not writing to those who can only read divine things. Golding shows his Erasmian side when he starts to talk about the

⁹⁰ Ibid., 348–49.

necessary accommodation of impure pagan ideas to Christian readers. He goes on to write that “If any stomacke be so weake as that it cannot brooke, / The lively setting forth of things described in this booke, / I give him counsell to absteine untill he bee more strong” (428–29). Golding’s language of purity, eating, abstention, and the senses locates his interpretive strategy within debates over the proper role of ceremonies and rituals in Elizabeth’s new ecclesiastical polity.

Golding’s language also reveals his debt to Galen, whose work *On the Natural Faculties* had been translated into Latin by Thomas Linacre in 1523. In that work, Galen devotes significant discussion to the stomach and its functioning as he attempted to prove, *pace* other Greek doctors, that the stomach does fundamentally change what it takes in. And this process of digestion, in which the stomach converts and processes nutriment, has much in common with Golding’s notion of his ideal reader as well as his “sickly” reader. Galen, discussing those with weak stomachs, writes,

Cum imbecillus est, quacumque parte complecti exacte, assumpta non valet: hic laxum quoddam spacium efficiens, permittit ea quae in se continent humida, pro figurarum varietate ex alio loco in alium transire, ac fluctuationum sonitus edere. Rationabile itaque est, qui hoc symptomate laborat, ne concoctionem quidem sufficientem sperare. Neque enim potest qui imbecillus venter est, probe concoquere.⁹¹

[When it is weak, however, being unable to lay hold of its contents accurately, it produces a certain amount of vacant space, and allows the liquid contents to flow about in different directions in accordance with its changes of shape, and so to produce gurglings. Thus those who are troubled with this symptom expect, with good reason, that they will also be unable to digest adequately; proper digestion cannot take place in a weak stomach.]⁹²

⁹¹ Galen, *Galenus Pergamensis de Naturalibus Facultatibus Libri Tres*, trans. Thomas Linacre (London, 1523), fols. 64v–65r.

⁹² Galen, *On the Natural Faculties*, trans. Arthur John Brock, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 237.

Those with weak (imbecillus) stomachs cannot properly “concoct” what they take in. And the cause of this problem is the “variety of shapes,” which it cannot process. On the other hand, the strong stomach has little difficulty with variety:

Itaque quod in cibis optimum est, id halitus specie et paulatim sibi attrahit, atque in tunicis suis reponit, iisdemque adiungit. Ubi abunde saturatus est, quidquid reliquum nutrimenti est, veluti onerosum aliquid rejicit. Quidque ex eo quod cum ventriculo habuit commercio, ipsum quoque consecutum est salturare aliquid. Neque enim fieri potest, ut duo corpora quae ad agendum ac patiendum sunt nata, ubi convenerunt, non vel simul patiantur agantque, vel alterum agat, alterum patiatur. Quippe si pares iis vires sunt, ex aequo tum agent, tum patientur. Sin longe superses vincatque alterum, magnum quiddam et quod sensu percipi possit in id quod patitur efficient. Ipsum vero vel exiguum aliquod et quod sensu deprehendi non possit, vel omnino nihil patietur. Porro in hoc potissimum dissidet nutrimentum, a medicamento venenoso. Hoc namque vim corporis vincit, illud ab hac vincitur. Minime igitur potest conveniens animali nutrimentum esse, quod ab iis quae in animali sunt qualitatibus, non vincitur. Porro vinci aliud non est, quam alterari.⁹³

[Thus it attracts all the most useful parts of the food in a vaporous and finely divided condition, storing this up in its own coats, and applying it to them. And when it is sufficiently full it puts away from it, as one might something troublesome, the rest of the food, this having itself meanwhile obtained some profit from its association with the stomach. For it is impossible for two bodies which are adapted for acting and being acted upon to come together without either both acting or being acted upon, or else one acting and the other being acted upon. For if their forces are equal they will act and be acted upon equally, and if the one be much superior in strength, it will exert its activity upon its passive neighbour; thus, while producing a great and appreciable effect, it will itself be acted upon either little or not at all. But it is herein also that the main difference lies between nourishing food and a deleterious drug; the latter masters the forces of the body, whereas the former is mastered by them.]⁹⁴

According to Galen, the healthy stomach is like a good interpreter of nutrients. It takes what is good and jettisons what is bad. Something that provides nutrients to the body is that which is “conquered” by the body, whereas a poison conquers the body in turn. And as Galen triumphantly concludes, “for something to be said to be conquered is none other than to say it

⁹³ Galen, *De Naturalibus Facultatibus*, trans. Linacre, fols. 68r–v.

⁹⁴ Galen, *Natural Faculties*, trans. Brock, 251.

is altered.” The stomach alters what it takes in, just like Golding’s interpreter of pagan culture. Galen, like Golding, portrays the stomach’s action in terms of a contest, striving to conquer what is foreign and to assimilate it.

Golding had another source for this interpretive metaphor, one that ties digestion to the confrontation of foreign religions. It is likely that he also had been influenced by John Calvin’s commentary on the passage from Titus 1:15, which relates his version of Christian liberty to the customs of other peoples. For Calvin, the Christian is at liberty to eat whatever he wants because his body can convert the food to good use. The “sick,” on the other hand, cannot. Indeed, this metaphor gains depth by the general trend after the Reformation of restricting the kinds of food that were thought to be good for you. For Reformation physicians, it was often the variety of foods that created problems for the eater.⁹⁵

Whereas Golding is more circumspect about the liberty to ingest, Calvin, at least in his commentaries, often advocates absolute liberty, both for the body and the conscience. Calvin relates the Pauline notion of purity to the Jewish concern with purity of foods, garments, and ceremonies: “Accordingly, this must be true till the end of the world, that there is no kind of food which is unlawful in the sight of God; and, therefore, this passage is fitly and appropriately quoted in opposition to the tyrannical law of the Pope, which forbids the eating of flesh on certain days.”⁹⁶ Calvin writes that Paul “upholds Christian liberty” in this passage: “All things are, therefore, pronounced by the Apostle to be pure, with no other meaning than that the use of all things is free, as regards the conscience” (ibid.). Calvin’s

⁹⁵ See Ken Albala, *Eating Right in the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 178–79.

⁹⁶ Calvin, “Commentaries on the Epistle to Titus,” in *Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. Rev. William Pringle, 22 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993), 21:305.

words set up the familiar conundrum of religious liberty: freedom of conscience often forbids the voluntary participation in some ceremonies, but not others.

Yet another set of quotations from the epistle to Titus argues for Golding's knowledge of Calvin's commentary on it. In Titus 1:12 Paul quotes Epimenides to the effect that the Cretans, to whom Titus was an emissary, are always liars and evil beasts, and that they have "slow bellies" (γαστέρες ἀργαί, qtd. in Calvin's commentary, 21:300). Calvin translates the line in Latin as "venter iners," with "iners" connoting a range of meanings, from "slow" and "weak" to "incompetent" and "useless." The meaning is that the Cretans are fickle regarding what they want to take into their bodies and minds and convert to good use. Similarly, Golding is not writing for those who are too particular about their food, but rather for those who can convert many different foods to good use. Golding, too, often sets up an opposition between the "weak" and the strong, or the unlearned and the learned.

But to cite the familiar passage from Titus at all was to enter into a broad, long-standing debate surrounding the liberty of selecting food, and consequently the debate surrounding the Church's injunction to eat fish on Fridays. This was a wide-ranging controversy, maybe nowhere better illustrated than in Erasmus's popular *Colloquia*. In the dialogue "The Profane Feast," the character "Christian" argues that even though Christians do have the liberty to eat what they will, "We sometimes chastise the immoderate Use of pleasant Things, by the Pain of Abstinence."⁹⁷ On the other side, the character "Austin" argues that the choice of meats is of no consequence. Erasmus's dialogue dramatizes a larger point about feasting, however. The "profane feast" is meant, after the manner of ancient pagan feasts, to be a place where ideas are freely exchanged and debated. In *The Godly*

⁹⁷ Erasmus, *The Colloquies of Erasmus*, trans. Nathan Bailey, Online Library of Liberty
<http://oll.libertyfund.org/index.php?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php?title=1854&Itemid=27>

Feast, the character Eulalius (“the well spoken”) sets out succinctly the problems inherent in this kind of liberty:

It was lawful, it seems, to eat of all Meats whatsoever, and all Things that are Clean to the Clean. But the Question remaining is, Whether it be expedient or no? The Liberty of the Gospel makes all Things lawful; but Charity has always a Regard to my Neighbour’s Good, and therefore often abstains from Things lawful, rather chusing to condescend to what is for another’s Advantage, than to make Use of its own Liberty.

The “choice of meats” was thus both a metaphor for intellectual conversation and a byword for the conflict between freedom and decorum, individual religious practices and the avoidance of offenses and scandals that would retard inclusiveness.

Part of the problem hinged on the variations inherent in ceremonial worship. In yet another dialogue, Erasmus presents a fishmonger and a butcher, who debate the Church’s stance on eating meat. The Fishmonger ends up arguing that “Christian Liberty” does not mean that Christians can do whatever they want, but rather that they must obey human laws and ordinances with zeal and pleasure. The Butcher of course responds that to do one’s duty only because he is forced is not to have any choice in the matter, and is still to be under the “Old Law.” The Fishmonger seems to think that the New Law consists in spreading the gospel abroad to everyone, not just select men and prophets. He is basically saying that as of now the truth of the Christian religion is available for all to see, and he wonders why all do not acknowledge it. Affection blinds men to the truth of the gospel, and these affections result in diverging ceremonial practices.

Erasmus’s characters find common ground when they lament the rule that would expel a priest for wearing incorrect robes but would excuse him for terrible moral vices. The two conclude by trading stories that illustrate instances when the circumstances of the individual body should trump the papal ordinances forbidding consumption of meat. Calvin

does not share the same concern with the body, but he thinks that injunctions against flesh do restrain the individual conscience. Calvin's and Golding's point is that each should consume what is right for him to consume, and abstain where they should abstain. Calvin's position mediates between the two of Erasmus's speakers as he internalizes the distinction between pure and impure. Whereas in Erasmus's dialogue, Austin maintains that fish is literally unhealthy for the body, Calvin argues in terms of the conscience, writing that "the use of all things is free, as regards the conscience" (21:305). "Thus, if any law binds the consciences to any necessity of abstaining from certain kinds of food, it wickedly takes away from believers that liberty which God had given them" (21:305–6). But other writers were as conscious as Calvin was that such liberty must always be conscious of social circumstances.

The influential Protestant theologian Thomas Becon weighed in on the issue of fasting with similar advice. For him, fasting was about social decorum. Becon rehearses scriptural arguments about liberty of eating and the hypocrisy of those who would "strain out a gnat and swallow down a Camel."⁹⁸ Of course it hardly mattered *what* the Christian did or did not eat. Rather, the community and charity that resulted from communal fasting was crucial for its social value. As Becon argues, "God hath put the goods of this worlde into the ritche mens hands, that they shuld distribute part of them to the pore people" (sig. [Evir]). In fact, there were some fasts in England "called 'political fasts' intended purely pragmatically to keep a good supply of meat at a low price."⁹⁹ For Becon, this is an important part of the Christian liberty of Protestant believers, that because they could eat anything they wanted, they also should use that liberty for the benefit of the entire community. But Becon is careful to restrict the variety of food that Christians should eat, emphasizing instead techniques to

⁹⁸ Becon, *A Fruitful Treatise of Fasting* (London, 1551), sig. Diiiiir.

⁹⁹ Ken Albala, *Food in Early Modern Europe* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003), 202.

maintain temperance amidst too much variety. In fact, he criticizes “papists, whych in theyr fastes abstain from grosse fleshe, & deuoure all kynde of deinty and fine fishe, whiche make theyr bodies muche more prone to lewdnes, then the eatyng of flesh, and also bringeth the spirit into miserable seruitute & bondage” (sig. [Gvir]). Catholics fall into the trap of overindulgence in a variety of fish and sweets, a variety that actually restricts their ability to process food, both physical and spiritual.

It is easy to identify Becon’s erroneous fasters with Paul’s unbelievers, for whom everything is polluted by their own sickness, and with other representations of pollution through food in the 1550s that inform Golding’s “sickly folks,” who cannot process what is not purely divine. This problem is put into relief by contemporary ideas about exercise, eating, and the role of variety in both. The well-known physician Conrad Gesner published a short treatise on food and health in 1556 that advocates a variety of experience and of exercise, but also a strict regimen of food. “Sanus homo, qui & bene valet, & suae spontis est, nullis obligare se legibus debet: ac neque medico, neque alipta egere. Hunc oportet varium habere vitae genus, modo ruri esse, modo in urbe, saepiusque in agro: navigare, venari: quiescere interdum, sed frequentis se exercere” (the healthy is one who lives well and of his own accord, and who does not bind himself with any laws; he does not need a doctor or a trainer. This person should have a diverse kind of life, sometimes in the country, sometimes in the city, and often in the field: sailing, hunting, resting now and then, but frequently exerting himself).¹⁰⁰ Gesner’s classical sources counsel an eclectic moderation when it comes to what one should do and eat. According to them, the stomachs of those living in cities, and indeed almost all those who love literature, are weak. Celsus

¹⁰⁰ Gesner, *Sanitatis Tuendae Praecepta cum aliis, tum literarum studiosis hominibus, & iis qui minus exercentur, cognitu necessaria* (Zurich, 1556), 11; my translation.

recommends a variety of activities for the weak scholar, unless that is, he is a complete weakling (*perquam imbecillum*) (14).

But at the same time, Gesner is quite clear that variety in food is to be shunned along with association with Catholics and heretics. In his own words, “*Nos interim, qui non modo homines, sed Christianos, id est sanctos & pios nos profiteamur, ingluvie, luxuque conviviorum & comessationum, tum bestiis plerisque, tum hominum illis, qui religionis nostrae veritatem vel olim, vel hodie non agnoverunt, sumus deteriores*” (For us in the meantime, who are not only men but Christians, that is, who profess ourselves holy and pious, we are made worse by gluttony and the luxury of banquets and feasts, as well as by those many beasts, those kinds of men who once acknowledged the truth of our religion but today do not) (18–19). For Gesner, as for many others, the choice of food was not exactly a thing indifferent, but carried with it precise moral valences. He begins his work with the epigraph, “*contra luxum conviviorum,*” which does not exactly condemn feasts, but does condemn their excesses. While anything might be permissible to the Protestant, promiscuity of diet was certainly not advisable.

While a variety of habits and lifestyle might be good for you, variety of food might be bad. Presumably, exercise helps someone maintain a healthy relationship with his environment. But at the same time, Gesner thinks that the “*alimenta quoque varia crassaque & cum iis condimenta*” (foods that are diverse and rich, along with their seasonings) (20) are painting Christians in a bad light when compared to the frugal Turks and even abstemious pagans such as Epicurus, who lived on bread and water. These various and massy foods affect the body like drugs, impairing its ability to process good food. Again, Gesner seems to

indicate that those who eat rich food are too weak to correctly process it. Variety is good for some, bad for others.

But Gesner does admire those who guard themselves against variety and immoderation, and his short treatise on food thus nicely encapsulates the problem for the discerning Protestant. On the one hand, variety of experience could be good. Processing experiences could make one a better interpreter of God's word. But too much variety could also be bad, especially when it came to the physical matter that was processed. And thus several influential Protestant writers come to different conclusions as to the amount of pollution and infection shuttled toward the Protestant by the physical rituals of different religions. Because of the weakness of most believers, moderation was opposed to variety, in Golding as in Gesner. But Golding's interpretive strategy sought to reconcile them, not further their opposition.

In accessing this debate, Golding also gestures at a larger one surrounding not only church rules about eating but also about the relationship and proximity between believers and unbelievers. The question, as it was posed by others of Golding's era, involved whether or not the faithful were polluted by contact with the unfaithful. Obviously, such questions were underpinned by the essential, or non-essential, differences perceived to separate groups of people in the early modern world. Protestants were especially open to criticisms of insularity and willful separation from other believers. For example, Thomas Dorman opens his 1564 treatise attacking John Jewel with an epigraph from Augustine: "*Nequé enim comunicas omnibus gentibus, & illis ecclesiis Apostolico labore fundatis,*" which Dorman translates, "for thou doest not communicat with all Nations, nor with those churches founded by the apostles labour." Dorman makes the obvious connection between the denial of

communication and the denial of communion.¹⁰¹ It is true that Protestant writers were often vexed by what they saw as the problem of mingling with unbelievers, fearing both physical and spiritual pollution, contamination, and infection.

This concern for cleanliness was often worked out through the various ceremonies by which other religious groups had expressed their beliefs and created their identities. Peter Vermigli's 1555 treatise on the issue of "cohabitation" is a rather extreme example of Protestant insularity, but nevertheless shows the logical conclusion of many arguments for purification of body and mind.¹⁰² The treatise is an English translation of part of Vermigli's lectures on the book of Judges, and the aggressively separatist tone of that book comes through in the treatise. Indeed, when Vermigli's commentary on Judges was published in 1564, the publisher John Day dedicated the anonymous translation to the earl of Leicester. In his commentary on Judges, Vermigli exercises himself on questions such as "Whither it be lawful for Christians to seeke for helpe of infidels."¹⁰³ Vermigli spends several folio pages answering in the negative. It is true that Christians can live in peace with unbelievers, he says, "especially if [the peace] be concluded for the peaceable defending and keping of the bondes or borders on ether syde" (fol. 99v). Christians can only deal with infidels if the result is that the borders between the two are reinforced. But Vermigli is adamant that the ungodly cannot help the godly at all:

For if Paule will have us rather to suffer wronge and hurt, than that we shoulde go to the judgement seats of the infidels when we are in controversy

¹⁰¹ Dorman, *A Proufe of Certeyne Articles in Religion, Denied by M. Iuell* (London, 1564), sig. Y3v.

¹⁰² For a discussion of this treatise as an example of "mental habits of binary opposition, antithesis, and inversion," see Patrick Collinson, "The Cohabitation of the Faithful with the Unfaithful," in *From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution and Religion in England*, ed. Ole Peter Grell, Jonathan I. Israel, and Nicholas Tyacke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 54.

¹⁰³ Vermigli, *Most Fruitfull and Learned Commentaries of Doctor Peter Martir Vermil Florentine* (London, 1564), fol. 99v. Citations will appear in the text.

with our brethren, how much lesse is it lawfull to use the helpe of the ungodly, to deliver us from other Christianes, which unjustlye oppresse us. (fols. 99v–100r)

The volume was a lavish production, and, in what probably would have caused Vermigli some concern had he known, the title page is adorned with classical philosophers. The motto proclaims that “truth flowers in adversity” (*virescit vulnere veritas*). The very next year Golding would publish his partial translation of the *Metamorphoses* and confront the problem of using the classical philosophers to access Christian truth. But Vermigli is quite clear that even the classical philosophers were not free from stain.

In the 1555 treatise, Vermigli’s language, mirroring his scriptural sources, is full of the “filth,” “pollution,” and “plagues” that the faithful might receive from the unfaithful. He worries that some might think that because of the various scenes in scripture where the faithful mix with the unfaithful it might be allowable for Protestants to so mix as well. Not completely true, he says. Jesus dined with pagans, Paul allowed marriages between believers and unbelievers, and some heretics even now may dwell among the faithful because the civil laws do not require that they *all* be put to death.¹⁰⁴ Vermigli argues that the faithful can have some contact with the unfaithful, but *only* in order to convert them. Strikingly, the faithful cannot have “familiar conversacion with the unbelievers for their own cause as for their recreacion or for their gayn and profite.” Of course, Vermigli restricts access to the unfaithful to those who are learned, and those learned men of course must never participate in rituals and ceremonies of the unbelievers, because it is an immutable rule that “Euell things ar not to be doone that goode maye comme therof” (fol. 4v).

But what about the “weake and unlearned man” (fol. 6v)? Vermigli asks if it is allowable for someone to learn from an “unfaithful master.” He answers in the negative,

¹⁰⁴ Vermigli, *A Treatise of the Cohabitacyon of the Faithfull with the Unfaithfull* (London, 1555), fol. 2v–3r.

because “Yt is a very dangerus thinge to use them which ar unbeleavers as Masters and teachers.” Vermigli concludes, “that such a weakling shuld use an unfaithfull Master I thincke that he shuld abstayn alltogether from suche” (fol. 7v). Vermigli finds the language of infection useful to drive home his advice to abstain. Doctors advise their patients not to go near the sick, and the lesson applies equally to those not sure in faith (fol. 9v).

The scope of Vermigli’s argument quickly expands beyond the individual to encompass the “cohabitation” of entire societies. “The histories of the heathen do teache us the same thinge” (fol. 12r), in the story of Alexander the Great succumbing to the influence of Persian culture and forgetting his Macedonian customs. But about the Jews and Jewish culture he is most explicit. It appears to Vermigli that God wanted the Jews to be separated from the gentiles, and thus set up the rituals and customs by which the Jews distinguished themselves from other peoples. Vermigli sees in the practice of tying a yellow ribbon around their elbows evidence that God wanted the Jews separate not only physically, by circumcision, but also in their clothes (fol. 14r). And it is especially important for Vermigli that the weaker sort of Christians have no contact with the Jews: “Neither shuld the weaker sort of Christians haue any familiaritie with them but only such Christians as be learned and constant in the truithe.” Vermigli is adamant about the visibility and obviousness of their separate status: “it is meete and convenient that they shuld be known from the Christians by their araye or som suche outward signe les any man at unwares shuld be conuersaunt with them as though they wer Christians” (fol. 56r–57r). Again Vermigli contrasts the learned with the unlearned and tries to devise elaborate protections for those who could possibly be lost from the faith. Like Golding, Vermigli is on the lookout for the “simpler sort” of people,

who are constantly apt to misinterpret and misunderstand different religious customs and beliefs.

One finds a mixed reception of these ideas in the works that Arthur Golding translated. He translated David Chytraeus's treatise on the Pauline epistles and holiday liturgies in 1570, in which Chytraeus expresses his view, similar to Vermigli's, that the faithful and the unfaithful make a poor match. Chytraeus was a Lutheran centrist; and, contrary to the Philippists, he could not bring himself to advocate proximity to unbelievers. Like Calvin in his treatise on offences, Chytraeus worried over the possibility for offence offered by the intermixing of pagan and Christian cultures. For him, Paul's epistle to the Corinthians urges the faithful away from the "infection of worshipping Idols, and specially from eating meates offred unto idols."¹⁰⁵ He expounds on this scriptural locus:

The occasion wherof is this: It was a custome in sacrifices too burne part of the offering vpon the Altar, and to set parte of it too eate before them that bestowed the offering. Vnto these feasts resorted certein of the Corinthians that wer conuerted to the true knowledge of Chryst: who vaunting of their lerning and wisdome, reasoned that Idols were nothing, and that it was lafull too vse indifferent things as men listed: and that it is a thing indifferent to eate fleshe offered too idolles, or not to eate it. (ibid.)

Chytraeus agrees with Vermigli that no evil may ever be done to good purpose. In fact, conversion is a complicated process and does not simply depend on a good will, or good intentions. Paul says that "the godly ought in no wise to be present at such feasts where flesh sacrificed to idols is set upon the table, bycause that by their example the worshipping of Idols myght bee confirmed, and the consciences of the weak might be offended and wounded" (ibid.). In theory Chytraeus does accept the commonplace of the New Testament

¹⁰⁵ Chytraeus, *A Postil or Orderly Disposing of Certeine Epistles Usually Red in the Church of God, uppon the Sundayes and Holydayes Throughout the Whole Yeere*, trans. Arthur Golding (London, 1570), 292. Citations to this edition appear in the text.

that all the gentiles are called to salvation despite their religious practices. In his explanation of verses usually read on Epiphany, he writes,

in the doctrine of the calling of the Gentyles these three articles are always too bee considered. First, that the promise of the Gospell is vniuersall, and that God is not an acceptor of persones, but is indifferent too all men according too that one rule expressed in the Gospell (50).

But in practice Chytraeus was less assured in the capacity of the faithful to remain uninfected by pagan customs. Even though doctrine held that all are called to salvation, Chytraeus, like Vermigli, advises separation between Protestants, Jews, and pagans on the basis of the potential for physical and spiritual contamination.

But not all of the writers Golding translated believed that such separation was even a practical necessary. Indeed, one should not deny the very real impulse toward negotiation and inclusion in Tudor intellectual culture. Even the fairly conservative Bishop of Salisbury, John Jewel, argued in 1567 that reading pagan books could help the Christian to salvation, citing St. Augustine himself: “the waies, whereby either to procure Goddes Mercie, or to enkindle our Faithe, are many and sundrie. . . . S. Augustine saithe, He was sturred up to comme to Christe, by reading a Heathen Booke written by Cicero.”¹⁰⁶ Vermigli’s treatise was perhaps so adamant because he and his translator saw alternative theories that would govern the interaction of believers with unbelievers.¹⁰⁷ John Calvin’s sermons on Paul’s epistle to the Galatians contain some statements that indirectly contradict Vermigli’s and Chytraeus’s. Calvin is more evenhanded and political than the other two theologians, advocating not only contact with Jews but also accommodation.

¹⁰⁶ Jewel, *A Defence of the “Apologie of the Church of Englande,” Conteyninge an Answer to a Certain Booke lately set foorth by M. Hardinge* (London, 1567), 298.

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, the evidence for tolerant attitudes in Scott Oldenburg’s “Toward a Multicultural mid-Tudor England: the Queen’s Royal Entry circa 1553, *The Interlude of Wealth and Health*, and the Question of Strangers in the Reign of Mary I,” *ELH* 76 (2009): 99–129.

Golding frames Calvin's commentary on Galatians as a rebuttal to the necessity of ceremonies, but Calvin's text often belies the absolute necessity of rejecting ceremonies. At one point, Calvin takes up the question of why Paul circumcised Timothy but not Titus. It was, Calvin argues, completely a case of accommodating religious customs for a greater good:

Saint Paule therefore had circumcised Timothie: and the reason why, was for that hee sawe manye weaklings, whiche woulde haue bene offended bycause they were not yet thoroughly confirmed in the knowledge of the Gospell, but thought that it behoued them to keepe still the ceremonies of the Lawe. And it is sayd, that wee must yeeld one to an other, for charitie byndeth vs therunto. Euery man must not do what he him self thinks good, to the trubbling of his neybour: but we must so fashyon our selues one too an other, as none maye bee offended through our faulte. St Paule then forbare in hauing respect too the poore Ignorant weaklings, who not withstanding myghte bee brought to knowledge in tyme.¹⁰⁸

Again, our author mentions the weak and advocates concessions for them. But more importantly, Calvin argues that we should accommodate our actions to those around us, and “fashyon our selues one too an other” in order to minimize offense. Calvin's is a time-bound ethic, though. Christian liberty lasts forever, and it is only for a short time that believers have to participate in unclean rituals. Calvin makes it clear that eating flesh or fish is a thing indifferent to salvation, and yet he also argues that Christians should adapt their eating habits to Jewish customs: “Yea and when wee haue to do with any Iewes, which are not acquaynted with our customes, and that we go about to winne them and draw them to the obedience of the Gospel: we must for a tyme (in being conversant with them) absteine from the things which they think to be forefended” (fol. 63v). In other words, in Calvin's view the Protestant believer must sometimes abstain from things that the Jews prohibit. Vermigli and Chytraeus never said that the believer had to sometimes partake in rituals not his own. This would be,

¹⁰⁸ Calvin, *Sermons of M. Iohn Caluine upon the Epistle of Saincte Paule to the Galathians*, trans. Arthur Golding (London, 1574), fol. 63r.

for Vermigli, to do evil to accomplish good. Yet Calvin thinks that the believer may participate in rituals of different religions, as long as those rituals are illustrative of non-essential cultural differences. But Calvin constructs this participation as done for the benefit of the weak, or those who cannot understand why Christian habits must trump those of other beliefs.

Calvin also used the example of circumcision and what it represented to respond to one of the scriptural loci that most challenged his view of predestination. 1 Timothy 2:4 says that God would have all men saved, but Calvin thought that it only meant that God would have those saved who came to the knowledge of the Gospel. And of course, knowing the Gospel required being taught the Gospel and finally understanding the Gospel. But not all people could do that. “Yet so it is,” he writes in his commentary on 1 Timothy, “that there are many which do not profite in the Gospell: but rather become worse by it, yea even of them to whome the Gospell is preached, whiche are not all saved.”¹⁰⁹ He uses the example of circumcision to further illustrate the point. Circumcision among the Jews was “a sure and undoubted gage, that God had chosen that people for his owne. . . . And yet, was there not a speciall grace for some of that people? . . . Not all they that came of the race of Abraham after the fleshe are true Israelites.”¹¹⁰ His point is that although circumcision represents the outward sign of a real covenant, it does not represent salvation. Rather, external rituals and signs only imperfectly represent God’s will. Though God’s grace certainly extends to all people, “special grace” attends on some places and people more than on others. Calvin

¹⁰⁹ Calvin, *Sermons of M. Iohn Caluin, on the Epistles of S. Paule to Timothie and Titus*, trans. L. T. (London, 1581), 156.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 157.

basically defends his theories by arguing for the specificity of God's saving grace on some people but not others.

The key point, though, is that God must work through the human vessels he has appointed to spread his word, his prophets and apostles. In fact, this is a tense moment in his theology, which is why he spends so much time worrying it. Calvin has to concede that extending grace to all people requires attention to the specific human beings that will hear and interpret his words. He insists that God does not actually damn us: even among the elect, correct interpretation is not assured. This is the reason that Paul was sent to the Cretans in the first place: to reform their slow bellies that could not handle knowledge of God.¹¹¹

Just as Golding writes to those who can process complex foods, Calvin and a host of other Protestant writers advocate liberty of eating as a metaphor for the freedom from canonical and papal restraints. Another issue that loomed large in debates about liberty was that of vestments and their role in Protestant ceremonies of worship. The vestiarian controversy, largely carried out in print between the returning Marian exiles on one side and the bishops, especially Matthew Parker, on the other, revolved around the stance of believers toward things indifferent, or those matters not strictly necessary for salvation.¹¹² The ministers who protested against certain holdovers from Catholic liturgy, such as the wearing of the surplice during services, wanted the liberty to do away with what they disliked about

¹¹¹ For the early modern reception in England of Paul's project of ecclesiastical expansion and accommodation, see Gregory Kneidel, *Rethinking the Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Literature: the Poetics of All Believers* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), chap. 1.

¹¹² For a summary of the controversy and an annotated list of works that comprised it, see Peter Milward, *Religious Controversies of the Elizabethan Age: A Survey of Printed Sources* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), 25–29.

the service. But Parker and the bishops wanted to maintain the order and conformity of services.¹¹³

Robert Crowley was enlisted by the ministers to publish his contribution in 1566, and his treatise describes how they view the problem: “Wee graunt, that of themselves, they be things indifferent, and may be used or not used, as occasion shall serve, but when the use of them will destroy, or not edifie, then cease they to be so indifferent, that in such case we may use them.”¹¹⁴ Thus, Crowley concludes that the worst thing about forcing conformity is that it makes strangers and foreigners out of those who used to be one’s neighbors and friends. By this he means that instead of relating to people on one’s own terms, conformity *invents* causes for dissension and conflict. He goes on: “we hope therefore, that our Prince and all good men, will like well with this our doing, understanding by Christian libertie, that freedome that Christ hath brought us unto, by beating downe the particion that was betweene the Jewes and gentiles, which was the law of ceremonies contained in the law written” (sig. [Biiiv]). Crowley wants a degree of sameness among Protestants and he fears the hierarchies of social distinction and separation that other writers had advocated in order to divide believers and unbelievers.

Crowley thus rejects the dynamic of Titus 1:15, appealing to the absolute authority of God rather than the process of conversion that the pure man uses to put evil things to good use. Crowley seems more worried about the effect of the minister’s example on others. If the use of things indifferent creates offense, then it should not be used: “It is good (sayth S. Paule) not to eate fleshe, nor to drink wine, nor to do any other thing, wherat thy brother doth

¹¹³ See Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: The Church in English Society, 1559–1625* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 31–32.

¹¹⁴ Crowley, *A Brieve Discourse Against the Outwarde Apparell and Ministring Garmentes of the Popishe Church* (London, 1566), sig. Aiiir–v.

stumble, or is offended, or made weake.” He also advocates separation from the unbelievers, because “what parte can a faithfull man have with an infidell?” Crowley’s argument is not one that allows accommodation or compromise; it respects divisions of believers and unbelievers even as it throws out artificial distinctions of hierarchy represented in garments and external rituals.

Such clear-cut calls for uniformity through diversity, for a kind of negative liberty, demanded an intellectually sophisticated response that would discuss both scriptural precedents and justify uniformity of outward apparel in terms of its usefulness for the community. It was a long-standing question, whether or not religious unity could be maintained in the face of a variety of rites, and was mulled over by scholars such as Nicholas of Cusa.¹¹⁵ Archbishop Matthew Parker’s treatise displays the same fear of creating scandals and offenses for the believer, but concludes that such scandals are best avoided by engaging and converting strange rites. He begins by citing a letter of Augustine: “For I haue perceyued, euen to my great sorow and heauynes, much disquietyng of the weake to be caused by the contentious stubbernes and superstitious feare of certayne brethren, which rayse vp so braulyng questions, that they thynke nothing to be well done but what they do them selues.”¹¹⁶ The contentions arise from some people overly fond of their own customs, and who mistake those customs for reason. And yet Parker ultimately affirms the value of, if not custom itself, but the *perception* of custom and its role in the fabric of society. He cites Augustine again at one point, who learned that “Many thynges muste be borne [*multa*

¹¹⁵ See Carina L. Johnson, “Idolatrous Cultures and the Practice of Religion,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67 (2006): 601–2.

¹¹⁶ Parker, *A Briefe Examination for the Tyme, of a Certaine Declaration, lately put in print in the name and defence of certaine ministers in London, refusyng to weare the apparell prescribed by the lawes and orders of the realme* (London, 1566).

tolleranda], when orderly meanes do not serue to cut them of” (sig. **4v). Also, “some tymes profitable altering of such thynges as were long accustomed, breed trouble in the Church by newenes of chaunge.” Parker takes seriously the value of maintaining historical continuity in a religious community.

He also certainly does think that the purity of believers gives them license to use formerly unclean ceremonies, rituals, and spaces. “The histories Ecclesiasticall also haue diuers experiences, howe much our auncient fathers increased Christes Church by such godly pollicie. Hence it was, that they plucked not downe all the Jewyshe Sinagoges and Heathenyshe Temples, but turned them to the seruice of God: that they altered theyr feast dayes: that they chaunged their rites to Godlye purposes” (sig. ***1v). But for Parker, the laws established by a godly society are the instruments of purification. They make it allowable to give offense to some who do not like certain rites and ceremonies. Even more importantly, Parker refutes the idea that conversation between different groups is forbidden. People in England do not really have to worry about bumping into pagan sacrifices in the street, but they do have to worry about encountering differences in religious beliefs and practices:

And yf there be in a Church where Christes Gospel is purely preached and his sacraments rightly ministred, some euyl among the good, as in one net diuers sortes of fishes, in one fiede wheate and tares, in one barne corne and chaffe: yet the good are not sayde to communicate or be defyled of the badde, as long as they consent not to theyr wickednes, but depart from among them, not by corporall separation, but by dissimilitude of life and diuersitie of maners, though they both vse the same temple, the same table, the same sacraments. (sig. [***4r])

In other places, Parker discusses most of the major scriptural loci that deal with liberty of eating, dressing, circumcision, and worship. Parker maintains throughout that Christian

liberty entails permitting a wide variety of rites, so long as they fall under the aegis of the governing body of the church. His is a kind of positive liberty of religious practice.

Suffice it to say that, in the years before Golding published his translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Protestant scriptural commentary and controversy had been enjoying a print explosion in England. Golding would have found a range of issues and ideas against which to position his own method of interpreting alien religious practices. But his method is itself various. His translations do not reveal his sympathy for any one branch of Protestantism. Any attempt to set into ideological camps the various opposing groups in the religious community of early-Elizabethan England will be frustrated by the shifting positions they maintained. Sometimes Calvinists agreed with Lutherans, and sometimes even with Philippists, and sometimes they all disagreed with each other and the established English church. The one thread uniting them all is that they saw in the variety of available ecclesiastical disciplines a potential source of doubt and conflict.

Following from Golding's own translations and the writings of his contemporaries, we must read Ovid's poem in terms of the religious practices that its characters continually desecrate and re-sanctify. Golding tells us in the preface to the reader that Ovid's poem contains "darke and secret misteries," and he sets out a hitherto unused method of reading those mysteries. He writes,

And even as in a cheyne eche linke within another wynds,
And both with that that went before and that that follows binds:
So every tale within this booke doth seeme to take his ground
Of that that was reherst before, and enters in the bound
Of that that folowes after it: and every one gives light
To other: so that whoo so meanes to understand them right,
Must have a care as well to know the thing that went before,
As that the which he presently desires to see so sore.

(428)

This method would have seemed strange because heretofore Ovid's tales had mainly been read as isolated morality plays that illustrated one particular vice and its punishment. The idea that the reader had to look for connections between stories was new.¹¹⁷ Golding's convoluted language mimics the confusion of the reader going back and forth between what he has already read, suggesting that Ovid's language repays re-reading, but also that such a reading is crucial to avoid becoming corrupted by its tantalizing surface. So, a reading sympathetic to Golding's purpose must look not only for connections between stories but also for the mixture of pure and impure. It would look for the places where the Christian reader might encounter a difficult interpretive hurdle as he confronts pagan religious practices.

A prime example of the difficult religious situations offered by the text is the story of the first transgression against the gods. Lycaon is the first to break divine law, by planning to kill Jupiter, but first killing and cooking his other guests. Like many of the stories in the poem, this one revolves around the materiality of infection and corruption and the eventual purging and reconstitution of the community. Lycaon's sin involves his need for physical proof of divinity. Even though Jove "gave a signe that God was come," Lycaon was not satisfied. He thought to kill the disguised Jove to determine, "By open proufe, ere long I minde to see, / If that this wight a mighty God or mortall creature bee. / The truth shall trie it selfe" (10). Lycaon wants verifiable proof: he will test out (*experiar*) the divinity of Jove and he expects that "nec erit dubitabile verum" (the truth will not be doubtful).¹¹⁸ Lycaon's

¹¹⁷ On the novelty of Golding's suggested method, see Raphael Lyne, *Ovid's Changing Worlds: English "Metamorphoses," 1567–1632* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 34–36.

¹¹⁸ I cite Ovid's Latin from the Loeb edition of the *Metamorphoses*, ed. and trans. Frank Justus Miller, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 1:16. I have also checked the Loeb's version against the version that Golding likely used, that of Raphael Regius, *P. Ovidii Metamorphosis cum Integris ac Emendatissimis Raphaelis Regii Enarrationibus & Reprehensione Illaru[m] Ineptiaru[m]* (Venice, 1493). For

attempt to substitute his own reasoning for that of the gods' would have been a familiar sin in the eyes of Golding's readers as well. Arthur Brooke, an early Protestant apologist of the Elizabethan Church, wrote in 1563 that "men may not ryse aboue the Oracles and reuelations of God, for howe maye a man knowe hys meanyng and counsell any farther than those thynges whyche by hym haue beene reueled vnto vs."¹¹⁹ Jove does in fact give the people a "signe," but Lycaon flaunts his ratiocinative powers in the face of such revelation. His doubt sets the tone for the way that many mortals experience the action of the divine. While they want it to conform to reason and the senses, it never does but remains dubious and slippery.

So, for his crime Lycaon, along with the entire world, are destroyed. But, the gods still need people to worship them, so Jupiter creates a new race from Deucalion and Pyrrha. They are saved because they listen to the gods, specifically Themis and her oracles. The contrast with Lycaon is clear: the virtuous couple respects the rituals and, more importantly, the sacredness of the space of Themis's chapel. Lycaon did not trust in the "signe" that Jupiter gave at his arrival, whereas Deucalion and Pyrrha trust in the oracle from which they receive the command to repopulate the earth by throwing stones over their shoulders. And because of this, they too make a "proufe," but theirs is successful (16).

They are also respectful of the decorum of religious ritual. When they arrive at the river Cephisus, its "sacred liquor straight they tooke and sprinkled with the same / Their heads and clothes." Themis's altar stands "Without one sparke of holie fyre or any sticke of wood" (15), and the couple rekindle the fire. Themis, the mother of justice, answers their prayers with an obscure expression. The oracle, like many from the classical world, is a test

Golding's reliance on Regius's text and commentary, see Grundy Steiner, "Golding's Use of the Regius-Micyllus Commentary Upon Ovid," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 49 (1950): 317–23.

¹¹⁹ Brooke, *The Agreemente of Sondry Places of Scripture Seeming in Shew to Iarre* (London, 1563), 54.

of religious interpretation. Oracles ask their hearers to square what they know of the gods' power and goodness with the unclear, human words that they hear uttered. As with any attempt to accommodate the divine to the human world, something is lost in translation. Golding was certainly familiar with the idiosyncratic nature of oracles in the ancient world. In 1564 he had translated Justinus's abridgement of Trogus Pompeius's history, in which the author describes the cave at Delphos: "Out of the whiche a certayne colde breth, driven up as it were in a certain winde, ascending upward, stirreth up the minds of the Prophets into a madnesse."¹²⁰ There is madness, too, in Themis's oracle; alongside the later oracles, her oracle taps into the primal, elemental forces of the earth to test its human interpreters. While Pyrrha worries that the goddess is asking her to commit sacrilege against her "Graundames bones" (16), Deucalion successfully interprets the riddle in a way that avoids profanation. Unlike the literal-minded Lycaon and Pyrrha, Deucalion has no trouble reconciling divine mandate with human action; his is an early (in the poem) compromise between the human and the divine realms. And as we have seen in Golding's prefaces, the translator clearly wants his readers to behave much like Deucalion, taking the dead matter of the poem and transforming it into something living. Like Deucalion, Golding's reader should not assume that divine commandments are either inscrutable or meant to be taken literally: rather, most often they present some problem of interpretation that requires their human interpreters to reconcile and assimilate conflicting imperatives.

The stories of Lycaon and Deucalion, so opposed, provide a pattern for Ovid's later representations of the tensions inherent in religious rituals that attempt to interpret and accommodate the will of the gods on earth. In book 2, Mercury appears as a trickster that

¹²⁰ Justinus, *Th'abridgment of the Histories of Trogus Pompeius, collected and wrytten in the Laten tonge, by the Famous Historiographer Justine*, trans. Golding (London, 1564), fol. 110r

likes to test humanity's weaknesses. He entrusts his herd of cattle to an old "churl" named Battus, and then disguises himself and tricks Battus into offering to sell the herd to him. Having shown man's perfidy in the economic sphere, he observes the same perfidy in religious devotion. Mercury sees a troupe of worshippers devoted to Minerva and falls in love with the most beautiful of the worshippers, Herse, the sister of Aglauros. Much like Leander being turned on by seeing Hero practicing solemn rites, Mercury seems aroused by the contrast between his physical desire and the forbidding nature of the ritual. "She was the verie grace / And beautie of that solemne pompe" (55), writes Ovid. By way of contrast, Mercury's lust is compared to a slingshot (*Balearica . . . funda*), which Golding upgrades to a gun: "in case as when the poulder / Hath driven the Pellet from the Gunne, the Pellet ginnes to smoulder" (ibid.). But when Mercury tries to visit Herse at her home, her sister Aglauros wants a bribe from him before she will betray her sister and alienate her from the service of Minerva. Aglauros of course is paid back by all-seeing Minerva with a curse from Invidia, but the point had been made: religious devotion is subject to the same frailties of the flesh as is everything else. Participating in the rituals of devotion only made Herse, along with many other women throughout the poem, more vulnerable to lust. External worship, because performed in public, has the added liability of being subject to public scrutiny. What concerned the reformers also concerned Ovid, however jokingly: that public ceremonies and rituals often had the effect of vulgarizing the beauty of holiness and perverting it to other ends.

The poem's characters are often presented with such puzzling contradictions when faced with the divine. The gods themselves, like the religious sects they came to represent in Ovid's time, want their own rites to be practiced and respected, sometimes at the expense of

human laws and public order. The story of Pentheus, Bacchus, and his followers, recounted in books 3 and 4, shows humans adjusting to the incursion of divine worship into their cities and streets. But even more, it points out the problem of religious enthusiasm and ceremonial celebration running up against a rational state power that distrusts such ecstasy, as well as more ascetic religious groups that also distrust mutable, external worship. The story of Bacchus would have presented several interpretive difficulties for the reader attuned to the religious complexities both of Ovid's text and sixteenth-century Protestant religious culture. Bacchus was associated with foreign, Indian religious customs, even though he was originally a Greek deity. Thus, the god might represent a native who supports foreign religious rituals in his native country (like a Catholic Englishman). Alternatively, he might represent the allure of superstition, which drives people to accept irrational modes of worship. Ovid begins book 3 by recounting the civil conflicts that arose along with the city of Thebes itself; Bacchus's conflicts with his native land are only an extension of the conflicts it cannot seem to avoid. But it is undeniable that Pentheus and those who resist Bacchus are punished either with death or metamorphosis. If the moral of the stories is that resistance to divine commands are futile, then those very divine commands are seriously undermined by enthusiasm and superstition.

Ovid goes out of his way to emphasize just how alien the rites of Bacchus appear to native Greeks. Acetes, the sailor who recounts Bacchus's appearance to Pentheus, describes the god's travelling companions: "at his feete there seemed for to crouch / Of Tygers, Lynx, and Panthers shapes most ougly for to touch" (84). The outward rites of Bacchus are similarly uncouth and frantically various, full of "noyse and howling loud" (85). Yet, there is still something sacred and divine about the rituals; Pentheus watches "these holie rites with

lewde prophaned eyes.” Though he originally went to the mountains to condemn the rites, when he is discovered “He now condemnes his owne default, and says he was too bolde.” Of course, he is torn limb from limb by his own mother.

On one level, the story represents the superstitions of the unlearned masses. Golding in his preface to the reader says that “By Bacchus all the meaner trades and handycraftes are ment” (425). So, Bacchus could represent the way rituals easily degenerate into inspired superstition in the hands of the unlearned. (This is also the conclusion reached by Johann Spreng in his 1563 edition of the *Metamorphoses*.¹²¹) Golding does counsel us to pay attention to the continuities between stories, and indeed what follows the Bacchus story seems to reinforce the interpretation of Bacchic rites as inspired nonsense. The daughters of Minyas are somewhat ascetic and refuse to honor Bacchus at the beginning of book 4. They are “bent of wilfulnesse, with working / Quite out of time to breake the feast” (87). They go on to pass the time by telling stories, instead of celebrating in the streets along with the rest of Thebes. The stories they tell are similarly ascetic, emphasizing the dangers of physical desire and lust. Pyramus and Thisbe, and Salmacis and Hermaphrodite, are brought down by physical attraction and the tendency to misinterpret physical signs from the body (Pyramus by the lion’s blood that he mistakes for Thisbe’s, and Salmacis by Hermaphrodite’s glittering and glistening limbs). Their stories anticipate later ones in which human lovers are often betrayed by their attempts to manipulate the physical world to solve their problems. Indeed, most attempts to address the numinous by means of the carnal meet with disaster.

¹²¹ See Spreng, *Metamorphoses Illustratae* (Frankfurt, 1563), fol. 46v (accessed via the “Ovid Illustrated” database, <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/latin/ovid/ovidillust.html>). He writes that “vana voluptatis furibundaque gaudia vulgi / qui spernit, tutum non habet ille locum” (he who spurns the vain and frantic pleasures of the vulgar finds no safe place). But “impius at cultus quem iuuat omnis amat” (lit., everyone loves him whom impious worship pleases; or, accepting impious habits of worship makes him beloved by all).

Similarly, Bacchus's divine power eventually reaches the daughters of Minyas: "The house at sodaine seemde to shake, and all about it shine / With burning lampes, and glittering fires to flash before their eyen, / And Likenesses of ougly beastes with gastfull noyses yeld" (99). They are turned into birds, a symbol of their alienation from the physical instantiation of divine power, forever caught between heaven and earth. Even though the main thrust of the story for Golding involved the superstition of Bacchus's followers, Pentheus and the Minaiads are still punished in the end. So, the story also represents the rightful role of accommodation within a religious community. The daughters refused to participate in what were lawful, temporary expressions of religious ecstasy and release. Whether or not we identify Minyas's daughters with true-blue Protestants, their situation might remind those Protestants of the duty to square conscience with practice. Golding even calls their refusal of Bacchus's divinity "heresie," translating the more benign Latin word "impietas," which usually signifies neglect of duty, not a total change in belief. Golding, too, probably realized that the story could be applied to the problem of accommodating religious rituals to the vagaries of the flesh: they could be somewhat mediated by virtuous withdrawal, but ultimately there had to be some mixture, some sort of mitigation of what was foreign and strange.

In later books of the poem, the gods play less and less of an overt role, and the conflicts move inward. However, the framework of a society governed by rituals and religious devotion is never wholly forgotten. So it comes as no surprise when the rites of Bacchus intrude in the middle of the story of Tereus, Philomela, and Procne. The story is familiar: Tereus weds Procne, who then wants her sister to visit his kingdom in Thrace. Tereus is enflamed by lust at the sight of Philomela, and when he wins her over by guile he

rapes her and cuts off her tongue to silence her. She weaves a cloth that tells of what happened to her and sends it to her sister. Procne immediately falls into a kind of madness, and is aided by the license granted to her by the rites of Bacchus that were being celebrated:

It was the time that wives of Thrace were wont to celebrate
The three yeare rites of Bacchus which were done a nighttimes late.
A nighttimes soundeth Rhodope of tincling panes and pots:
A nighttimes giving up hir house abrode Queene Procne trots
Disguisde like Bacchus other froes and armed to the prooffe
With all the frenticke furniture that serves for that behoofe.

(156)

The rites of Bacchus provide not only a cover for Procne but also an excuse for the horrible revenge they exact on Tereus, cooking his son Itys and serving him to his father.¹²²

The scene is meant to resonate with other Bacchic rituals. In Ovid's *Fasti*, Bacchus is said to be the first to have offered "roast flesh" (*viscera tostata*) of oxen; also, "fathers commend to thy care and divine keeping the pledges that they love, their sons"; and "a freer life is entered upon under thine auspices."¹²³ Itys acts as a sacrifice to Bacchus on behalf of Tereus, who has neglected his religious duties. Ovid wrote the story with a cyclical logic of generation, ingestion, and metamorphosis. What Tereus ate was in a sense the fruit of his own crime; since he had corrupted the mouth of Philomela, his own mouth was corrupted in turn and with his own offspring. The "moral" of the story is thus more complex than simply a warning against lust; in actuality it enacts a version of "to the pure all things are pure," in that Tereus's punishment is a metaphor for those readers who are blinded by their own limitations. Ovid emphasizes his blindness throughout: "O God, what blindness doth the heartes of mortall men disguise?" (152) (*quantum mortalia pectora caecae noctis habent*);

¹²² For a discussion of the tradition of "Dionysiac Heroines" in Greek culture, see Deborah Lyons, *Gender and Immortality: Heroines in Ancient Greek Myth and Cult* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 103–33.

¹²³ Ovid, *Fasti*, ed. and trans. James Frazer, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951), 175 and 177–79. Citations will appear parenthetically in the text by page number.

and “so blinded was his heart” (158) (*tantaque nox animi est*). He is trapped inside his own body, in a way, and certainly trapped by his inability to see outside of his own desires.

Whereas the communal, celebratory dimension of religious devotion assists Procne, it seems never to affect Tereus or enter his mind.

Tereus, like a bad reader, or someone with a weak stomach, is unable to process what he takes in and therefore he is unable to see the consequences that his actions have on his society at large. Indeed, there is little sense of a real society surrounding the characters in the middle books of the poem, which deal mainly with isolated individuals whose lusts and passions often adversely affect their nameless subjects or countrymen. Religious ecstasy exists on the margins of society; it has not yet been standardized or brought into accord with rules of civic life, and so it is wild. In book 11, Orpheus ends up torn apart by Bacchantes, women in the throes of religious passion. Their description is one of a marginalized group operating outside of the bounds of both their city and their god. The Bacchic women took umbrage at Orpheus when he criticized all women after he lost Eurydice. “Frantik outrage reigned” among them, and they blow horns and beat drums, “bedlem howling out” (273). They are “cruell feends,” and in the process of murdering Orpheus they also kill oxen working in the field (274). Even Bacchus himself is angry at their excesses and eventually turns them all into trees. The story presents a clear contrast between Orpheus, who can charm savagery and turn it into civility, and the Bacchantes, who represent the slightly different savagery of untamed, inspired religion.¹²⁴ There has not yet been a détente between civic society and the more outré dimensions of religious worship.

¹²⁴ For more Renaissance and classical sources identifying the Bacchae with untamed furor, see H. David Brumble, *Classical Myths and Legends in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: A Dictionary of Allegorical Meanings* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 47–48.

But this situation starts to change when Ovid begins to recount the Trojan War, which shows for the first time the dire consequences for civilization of passions run amok. The war of course sets in motion the founding of Rome; so Ovid shifts his emphasis from the isolated individual effects of the passions to the ways in which the passions are channeled through religious practices and their effects on the commonwealth. The twelfth book introduces the cause of the Trojan War in a single line: “within a while with ravisht wife he brought a lasting warre” (299). Immediately thereafter, Ovid gives us a scene that shows the crucial importance of religious rituals in waging the resulting war. The prophet Calchas told the Greeks that they had to sacrifice to Diana in order to calm the angry seas, and the victim is to be Agamemnon’s own daughter, Iphigeneia. This story receives a familiar twist, though, as Iphigeneia is saved at the last minute by Diana and replaced by a deer.

The entire ritual is described as the triumph of reason over emotion. Golding translates, “pitie yielded had to cace of publicke weale, / And reason got the upper hand of fathers loving zeale” (300). It is revealing that Golding invents the word “reason” in that phrase as he translates Ovid’s “*rexque patrem vicit*” (the king conquered the father [in him]). Ovid sees Agamemnon’s two roles, as king and father, competing against each other, and Golding interprets “*rex*” to mean “reason”; in Golding’s view, reason here tells Agamemnon that the greater good must come before his personal love for his daughter. The whole scene is, for Golding, thoroughly rational: religious devotion is inextricably tied to the prosperity of the state, and it is only fitting that it be attended.

However, this scene stands out for its portrayal of the complex relationship between the individual and the collective community bound together through often nonsensical religious ceremonies. This scene provided the occasion of Lucretius’s famous criticism of all

superstitious religious practices, especially sacrifices, in his *De Rerum Natura* (1.80–101). Ovid may have shared Lucretius's dislike of superstitious ritual—later on Pythagoras voices a similar critique—but Ovid's poem does not entirely discount the value of these rituals. The story does point out just how inextricably linked are religious rituals and public benefits in the minds of the Roman people. Similarly, in his 1563 edition Spreng reads the story as a fable of public concerns trumping private ones: “Publica privatis excellunt commoda rebus, / Est nihili solum qui sibi vivit homo” (Public benefits come before private matters, and a man is worthless if he lives for himself alone).¹²⁵ Ovid's tale presents religious ritual as being a kind of necessary compromise that nonetheless links the individual to the larger community of humans and gods, but often at the expense of that individual's personal well-being. It represents the poem's embarkation upon the modern world, the world that saw the rise of civilizations still in existence in Ovid's lifetime. And so much of the rest of the poem examines the effects of religious devotion on human society.

Book 15 begins with the figure from early Rome that most epitomizes the ideal of a ruler both civically and religiously minded. This is Numa, the Roman king who set down both legal and religious standards in the wake of the inter-cultural conflict represented by the rape of the Sabine women. Numa was thought to have gotten advice from Pythagoras, and the king soon recedes as he listens to an old man tell him about the wisdom of Pythagoras, and it is with Pythagoras that the poem reaches a conclusion. Pythagoras and Numa represent, appropriately for Golding embarking on a career of religious translation, the desire to finally standardize religious precepts and make them acceptable to society. Pythagoras himself takes many of the poem's recurring images and motifs and criticizes, refashions, and examines them in his exposition of his philosophical positions.

¹²⁵ Spreng, *Metamorphoses Illustratae*, fol. 145v.

Pythagoras and his ideas were very attractive to Protestants in the sixteenth century. A few years after Golding published his complete translation of the *Metamorphoses*, he translated the Dutch Prince of Orange's justification of his war against Phillip II, written in 1568. The treatise is a list of the crimes of the Duke of Alva and the prince's justification for opposing the oppressive tactics of the Spanish-appointed governor.¹²⁶ Part of his self-defense consists of examples of the harsh injunctions that the Charles V had introduced into the Low Countries, by which various books were banned from being published. Alongside works by authors such as Eobanus Hessus and Sebastian Munster, the author lists "the commentaries uppon the poetry of Pythagoras."¹²⁷ Presumably the author of the injunction intended Hierocles' commentaries on the "Golden Verses" of Pythagoras, which contained advice about how to purify the body and soul through the regimens of the Pythagorean religion.

This kind of rigorous regimen was exactly what Numa was looking to import into the Roman state. An old man recounts to him about the origins of the Pythagorean community in Italy as well as the teachings of Pythagoras himself. The first part of Pythagoras's speech is the most important for my purposes, and besides seems to be the part that interested Golding the most. Pythagoras criticizes the religious practices that many of the characters in the poem have lived by, especially the practice of sacrificing flesh on altars. Readers of the poem would have seen countless examples of sacrifices to the gods throughout the work, some that produced results and some that did not. In fact, Ovid rarely shied away from describing the sacrifices in all their gory, offhand detail, as when Achilles feasts with the other princes in book 12:

¹²⁶ See Golding, *Elizabethan Puritan*, 156n4.

¹²⁷ *A iustification or cleering of the Prince of Orendge agaynst the false sclaunders, wherewith his ilwillers goe about to charge him wrongfully*, trans. Golding (London, 1575), 143.

there came a day of joy,
 In which Achilles for his luck in Cygnets overthrow,
 A Cow in way of sacrificyse on Pallas did bestowe,
 Whose inwards when he had uppon the burning altar cast
 And that the acceptable fume had through the ayer past
 To Godward, and the holy rytes had had theyr dewes, the rest
 Was set on boords for men to eate in disshes fynely drest.
 The princes sitting downe, did feede uppon the rosted flesh,
 And both theyr thirst and present cares with wyne they did refresh.
(303–4)

Pythagoras, of course, enjoined abstinence from eating meat, as the old man recounts in book 15:

He also is the first that did injoine an abstinence
 To feede of any lyvying thing. He also first of all
 Spake thus: although ryght lernedly, yit to effect but small:
 Ye mortall men, forbear to frank your flesh with wicked foode.
(379)

Pythagoras draws a connection between the rise of eating meat and the fall from the Golden Age, which was full of “freendshippe, love and peace” (380). And again, he derides the practice of sacrificing animals to the gods. He indicts the superstition of men who think that the gods delight in sacrifices or who think that the secrets of the gods can be discovered by the haruspication of animals.

Pythagoras is pulling at a thread that runs throughout the *Metamorphoses* as well as the *Fasti*. The logic of sacrifices was notoriously murky; Ovid himself appears skeptical of their efficacy, but nevertheless includes an origin story for sacrifices in book 1 of his poem on the Roman calendar. His account there mirrors Pythagoras’s criticism in the *Metamorphoses* in that it opposes the corruption of modern sacrificial practices to the purity of the golden age:

The knife that now lays bare the bowels of the slaughtered bull had in the
 sacred rites no work to do. The first to joy in blood of greedy sow was Ceres,
 who avenged her crops by the just slaughter of the guilty beast; for she learned

that the milky grain in early spring had been routed up in the loose furrows by the snout of bristly swine. (27)

Pythagoras too links the origins of sacrifices to affronts against plants dear to the gods. “The Goate,” he says, “for byghting vynes was slayne at Bacchus altar whoo / Wreakes such misdeeds” (380). But the great majority of modern sacrifices are done for no reason at all, according to him. Oxen, for example, are guiltless, and their sacrifice is shameful: “They father / Theyr wickednesse upon the Goddes. And falsly they doo gather / That in the death of peynfull Ox the Hyghest dooth delight” (381). Pythagoras’s vegetarianism comes as a result of his critique of superstition, especially the belief that we must placate the gods to avoid eternal damnation. But because the soul is immortal, it simply inhabits various bodies in a continual cycle. It was these two dimensions of Pythagoras’s thought, vegetarianism and metempsychosis, that most intrigued and provoked Protestant thinkers, including Golding himself in his epistle to Leicester.

Golding devotes about 45 lines to Pythagoras’s philosophy, correcting it but also testing its viability. He links Pythagoras’s idea of metempsychosis to the three-tiered soul: that is, generative, sensual, and rational. There is a fourth, moral kind of soul that distinguishes good people from bad people, according to Pythagoras.¹²⁸ But Golding vacillates in his portrayal of Pythagoras’s argument. First, he says that animals cannot partake of reason and so cannot share in religious salvation. But, then he does “graunt that when our breath dooth from our bodies go away, / It dooth eftsoones returne to ayre: and of that ayre there may / Both bird and beast participate, and wee of theirs likewyse” (406). This

¹²⁸ This argument was a familiar one in early Christians arguing for Christianity’s superiority to paganism. See, for example, Prudentius, *Contra Symmachum*, ed. and trans. H. J. Thomson, Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949–53), 2:70. Prudentius argues that even though all men share a common nature, Christians are superior because they “rite praecepta Dei sequuntur” (follow God’s commands with due observance). For discussion of the distinction between godly and ungodly proceeding from ritual behavior, see Jonathan Sheehan, “The Altars of the Idols: Religion, Sacrifice, and the Early Modern Polity,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67 (2006): 649–74.

commonality, however, has nothing to do with man's divine soul, which animals do not share. Protestants like Golding were divided over the reception of this aspect of the Pythagorean lifestyle. On the one hand, the philosopher was often praised for counseling abstinence and living a sober life. On the other hand, his notion of metempsychosis sounded too much like Purgatory to the ears of some, and even seemed to enforce certain behaviors (like abstinence from flesh) that Protestants took to be in the realm of Christian liberty.

The reception of Pythagoras reveals a fundamental tension in Protestant ideas about religious ceremony and quotidian behavior. Many Christians, not just Protestants, approved of the sobriety of the Pythagoreans. Their rules of living counseled frugality, a care for their surroundings, and an attention to diet. But Protestants especially balked at some of the restrictions that the ancient religion maintained. Protestant religion was more hierarchical, attending to the boundaries between "degrees": man and beast, Christian and heathen, and so on; whereas the Pythagoreans flattened such degrees by maintaining that souls could enter animals and even other people throughout time. For Protestants, being in their specific degree granted them a liberty that the ancients lacked; they conceived of themselves as free to use God's creatures, and the material world, as they saw fit. The same liberty extended to the use of heathen, pagan, and otherwise non-Christian cultural materials, such as Ovid's poem. We have seen Golding advocate the liberty of the "pure" to use impure materials, but evidence of this tension can easily be found in other writers responding to the discipline of the Pythagoreans.

It was a commonplace to comment on the Pythagoreans' reputation for sober living. In Eden's translation of Anghiera's treatise on the new world, he recounts a story about natives people who belong to "a secte of men whiche liued solytarily in the desertes and

wooddes and ledde their lyfe in sylence and abstinence more straightly then euer dyd the phylosophers of Pythagoras secte, absteinyng in lyke maner from the eatyng of al thynges that liue by bludde contented onely with suche fruites, herbes, and rootes as the desertes and wooddes mynistred vnto them to eate.”¹²⁹ The Catholic Anghiera and the Protestant Golding agree that the abstinence of the Pythagoreans is praiseworthy, if we can judge their opinions by what they translated. In Justinus’s abridgement of Trogus’s history, which Golding translated in 1564, we can find another example of the beneficial effect of Pythagorean mores. Trogus tells us a story about the people of Cortona, Pythagoras’s home in Italy and the same place Numa went to learn about the philosopher. They would have fallen into vice if not for Pythagoras, who reformed the manners of the people. In particular, “How much he was able to way with thother youth of the city, the bridling & overcoming of the stobern & froward stomakes of the women dothe wel declare.”¹³⁰ Pythagoras changed their taste for clothing and delicate food into frugality and temperance.

But this strict regimen also conflicted with the idea of Christian liberty, that believers could turn anything to good use, so long as they themselves were pure. When Philemon Holland translated Plutarch’s *Moralia* in 1603, he included Plutarch’s “Whether it be Lawfull to Eat Flesh or No.” In his introduction to the treatise, Holland writes that Plutarch did not seriously maintain Pythagoras’s opinion, even though he seems to in the text. Plutarch’s sophistical argument

ought not to be taken so, as if it favoured and seconded the errour of certeine fantastick persons, who have condemned the use of Gods good creatures: for in the schoole of Christ wee are taught good lessons, which refute sufficiently the dreames of the Pythagoreans, and resolve assuredly the good conscience of all those that make use of all creatures (meet for the sustentation of this

¹²⁹ Anghiera, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, trans. Eden, fol 181v.

¹³⁰ Justinus, *Th’abridgment of the Histories of Trogus Pompeius*, trans. Golding, fol. 94v.

life) soberly and with thanks giving, as knowing them to be good, and their use cleane and pure unto those whom the spirit of regeneration hath sanctified, for to make them partakers of that realme which is not shut up and inclosed in meats and drinks.¹³¹

As Calvin wrote in his treatise on offences (and Golding translated), “we denie that the kingdome of God consisteth in meate and drinke.”¹³² The sententia ultimately comes from St. Paul, who was advocating the freedom from overly restrictive dietary regulations among Jews, Gentiles, and competing Christian sects.

So, the reception of Pythagoras’s moral code was ambiguous. He could be seen as the critic of superstitious rituals, but he could also be portrayed as overly fastidious and restrictive. In fact, Pythagoras’s speech in the *Metamorphoses* has puzzled classical scholars because it seems to hijack the poem and derail its momentum at a crucial point, just as Ovid begins to describe the development of Roman culture.¹³³ Golding writes that “The oration of Pithagoras implyes / A sum of all the former worke” (413), but why put this summary before the real ending of the poem? The poem ends with the rise of Augustus and the deification of Julius Caesar, not with the philosopher. The real object of Pythagoras’s speech is Numa, to whom it is reported secondhand. Numa is left hanging while the old man speaks, and then is summarily dismissed in a few lines:

Men say that Numa furnisshed with such philosophye
As this and like, returned to his native soyle, and by
Entreatance was content of Rome to take his sovereintye.
.
this Numa did begin
To teach Religion, by the meanes whereof hee shortly drew
That people unto peace whoo erst of nought but battell knew.

¹³¹ Plutarch, *The Philosophie, Commonlie Called the Morals vwritten by the Learned Philosopher Plutarch of Chaeronea*, trans. Holland (London, 1603), 571–72.

¹³² Calvin, *Concerning Offences*, trans. Golding, fols. 92v–93r.

¹³³ See especially Philip Hardie, “The Speech of Pythagoras in Ovid *Metamorphoses* 15: Empedoclean *Epos*, *The Classical Quarterly*, n.s. 45 (1995): 204–14.

Numa, though, had a more important role in the reception of Roman culture than Ovid's brief account implies. The final vision of Rome in Ovid's poem is one in which the gods and men have come to a kind of uneasy peace, but peace nonetheless. "Jove rules the heavenly spheres, / And all the tryple shaped world. And our Augustus beares / Dominion over all the earth. They bothe are fathers: they / Are rulers both" (403). In a shaky rapprochement, religious and civic identities exist side by side at the end of the poem.

And it is precisely this sort of compromise between religious devotion and civic duties that greatly interested those involved in the creation and buttressing of the Elizabethan Church in its early days. Numa Pompilius could easily stand in for the godly monarch, importing the principles of learned compromise into a community rived by doubt. In Plutarch's "Life of Numa," translated by Thomas North in 1579, Numa appears as a godly king, able to introduce new religious customs to the formerly savage Roman people. Plutarch writes,

I doe finde, that which is written of *Lycurgus*, *Numa*, and other suche persones, not to be without likelyhood and probabilitie: who hauing to gouerne rude, churlishe, & stiffe necked people, and purposing to bring in straunge nouelties into the governments of their countries, did fayne wisely to haue conference with the godds, considering this fayning fell to be profitable & beneficiall to those themselues, whom they made to beleue the same.¹³⁴

Numa took on the task of civilizing the Romans and teaching them how to worship the gods:

Numa iudging it no small nor light enterprise, to plucke downe the hawty stomachs of so fierce and violent a people, and to frame them vnto a sobre and quiet life: dyd seeme to worcke it by meanes of the goddes, with drawing [E] them on thereto by litle and litle, and pacifying of their whotte and fierce corages to fight, with sacrifices, feastes, dauncings, and common processions, wherein he celebrated euer him selfe. (71)

¹³⁴ Plutarch, "Life of Numa Pompilius," in *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes*, trans. North (London, 1579), 69. Citations of this edition will appear parenthetically in the text.

He sets up a public religion inspired in large part by the teachings of Pythagoras, many of whose “ceremonies” Numa adopted as his own, putting on the “outwarde showe and semblaunce of *Pythagoras* holiness” (ibid.). Numa also banished images and representations of the gods from Roman temples. Those few ceremonies that he did allow were performed in accordance with Pythagorean precepts: he did not sacrifice animals and insisted that public ceremonies be carried out in silence.

Numa represents a sovereign who harnesses the power of custom, ceremony, and ritual in order to help his country cohere. Plutarch writes that Numa won his people to the worship of the gods “through custome” (77). But the coherence he helped to bring about was not just spiritual, it was also physical. He set up a temple to the god *Terme*, or the god of boundaries, and was the first king to delineate the boundaries of Rome (78). He wanted Romans to focus on the defense of what was their own not the conquest of foreign peoples. Ovid describes him in the *Fasti* as combining legal and religious force in order to compel the Romans to civilized behavior. The social contract proceeds inevitably from religious reform: “Hence laws were made, that the stronger might not in all things have his way, and rites, handed down from the fathers, began to be piously observed” (141). As in Plutarch’s account, Numa comes to represent the conjunction of religious and civic identity. By consolidating the religious customs of the Rome, he also consolidates their civic unity. By setting boundaries, he unifies the people civically, and by instituting ceremonies he unifies them religiously. Numa’s policies were aimed at bringing about civic harmony by means of religious practices, which were inculcated into the collective mind of Roman people through daily observance and custom.

The mixture of civic duties and religious rituals that Numa brought about mirrored the kind mixture that apologists of the Elizabethan Church saw as necessary for a godly society. In 1573, John Bridges was a theology student at Oxford, enjoyed the patronage of Francis Russell, and published a treatise defending the right of monarchs to legislate religious matters in their own countries. Numa plays a role as a conspicuous example of a “heathen prince” who had combined civic and religious discipline. Bridges writes that “*Numa Pompilius* hath his chiefest commendation not so muche for making ciuill lawes and pollicies to the Romaines, as for his lawes about theyr religion, theyr Priestes, theyr Nunnes, theyr Sacrifices. . . . The Romaine Princes them selues woulde labour principally for the office of the chiefe Bishoppe.”¹³⁵ The historical parallel also extended to the nature of the episcopal office. In 1574 the ecclesiastical moderate John Whitgift was busy defending his *Answer to the Admonition* from a reply by Thomas Cartwright. Like Archbishop Parker during the vestiarian controversy, Whitgift argues that Christian liberty gives believers the right to take impure things from other religions and turn them to good use. And like other moderates, Whitgift reasons that the external similarity of various rites and offices between pagans and Christians is no reason to reject those rites and offices. On the contrary, in the case of Archflamins and Archbishops, the similarity actually helped convert the gentiles to Christianity: it became a “meanes to plucke them from all their superstition and Idolatrie.”¹³⁶ The moderate position on pagan customs was that their external similarity did not affect Christian discipline negatively; on the contrary, moderates argued that recognition of

¹³⁵ Bridges, *The Supremacie of Christian Princes ouer All Persons Throughout Their Dominions* (London, 1573), 115.

¹³⁶ Whitgift, *The Defense of the “Aunsvere to the Admonition” against the Replie of T.C.* (London, 1574), 321.

similarities between pagans and Christians bolstered the faith of the latter because it taught them how to better reconcile foreign religious practices with their own.

Golding's translations show a mixed sympathy with the moderate positions in the late 1560s and early 70s, but gradually he became more allied with the moderates. His initial forays into religious translation were Calvin's work on offences and the two postils by Hemmingsen and Chytraeus. The postil by Chytraeus, as we have seen, was less tolerant than other works Golding translated; Chytraeus was, unlike Hemmingsen, a Lutheran centrist and not a Philippist. His advice to separate the faithful from the unfaithful in all matters was not shared by Calvinist moderates and certainly not by Philippists. But the translations of Chytraeus seemed to have been an afterthought in Golding's mind; a sequel to the profitable postil of Hemmingsen, it was commissioned by Lucas Harrison and George Bishop, who undoubtedly expected profit. Golding's real successes as a religious translator came when he translated Calvin's commentaries on Galatians in 1574 as a payment to William Cecil for his assistance with "that long continued sute of mine in the Exchequer."¹³⁷

Golding makes it clear that this work will present his feelings about Christian liberty, cleverly allying himself with the moderate Calvinism that had only recently become the position of the official church. In the preface Golding uses phrases that would have been immediately recognized as statements of his moderate position. He writes that scripture helps men "be perfect and foreward to al good workes: in so much that it is the power of God tending to the welfare of all that beleewe, both Iewes and Gentyles."¹³⁸ We have seen that in this commentary Calvin does advocate compromise between Christians and gentiles, a selective acceptance of certain rites and practices to facilitate assimilation and reconciliation.

¹³⁷ Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Galatians*, trans. Golding, sig. iir.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, sig. iiir.

Other examples of Calvin's moderate ideals abound in the works Golding translated in the 1570s and '80s. In his commentary on Deuteronomy, Calvin argues for concord between heathens and believers, in a digression on the gift of mount Seir to Esau. This gift created a rift between the different peoples of the region, and allows Calvin to ruminate on kinship and commonality: "True it is that there is not fleshly kinred betweene all men, to make them so neere of bloud as they might call one another cousins . . . yet is there a certain common kinred in generall, which is, that all men ought to think how they be fashioned after Gods image. . . . Even the heathen men knew that very wel."¹³⁹ This vein of Calvin's thought, cautiously advocating the mixing of Christian and heathen, appealed to those in Cecil's circle. Golding dedicated his translation of Calvin's Deuteronomy commentary to Thomas Bromley, who in 1583 was the Lord Chancellor and had strong ties to the earl of Oxford and Cecil himself as a former recipient of patronage.

Other writers also recognized Cecil's desire to see works that promoted a moderate concord and compromise between different cultures and religions, especially classical and Christian. A notable example of this kind of work was produced in 1577 by Henry Dethick, then studying for a bachelor of civil law degree at Oxford. His *Feriae Sacrae* (Holy Festivals) is a collection of poems celebrating important moments and figures in Christianity. The Latin poetry is in elegiac meter, meant to recall Ovid's *Fasti*, which is also a poem about festivals written in elegiac. But in both Dethick's preface and the prefatory poems, there is a careful delineation of what the author has taken from pagans and how he has transformed it. Moving beyond even that worthy goal, Dethick says in his preface that he is interested in

¹³⁹ Calvin, *The Sermons of M. Iohn Caluin vpon the fifth booke of Moses called Deuteronomie*, trans. Golding (London, 1583), 62.

reconciling human society and its practices with the divine and that his collection tends to that purpose:

Ego, cum intellexeram, optimam in notis harmoniam, tum fieri demum, cum membra, capiti: appetitus, rationi: humana, divinis pareant, & obsequantur. Ita certe Civili prudentiae, feriam navabam operam, ut coelesti simul sapientia, tanquam moderatrice quadam, eandem regerem, & ita pulchre cum Iustiniano, Mosen, & prudenter coniugerem.¹⁴⁰

[I had learned that the best kind of harmony in music comes about only when the members obey the head, appetite obeys reason, and human things follow the divine. And so I did my best to guide my work on festivals to civil prudence, with celestial wisdom serving as a moderator, and thus happily, and prudently, to join Moses with Justinian.]

He goes on to argue, “si delectant nonnullos, in carminibus Ethnici, cur non arrideant quibusdam, in carminibus Christiani? Igitur in bona materia, voluntas summa sit declarata, quamvis facultas similis, non exhibita: pateat affectus animi, etsi effectus causae non adsit” (if some take pleasure in pagan music, why should certain of those not like Christian music? Just as in good material the will of the maker is evident, even though the means are not apparent, thus the movement of the mind may be known, even if the effect of the cause is not present) (sig. Aiiiv.). Dethick uses the four Aristotelian causes here to suggest the connections between the pagan form that he uses and its spiritual content. But he also suggests that pagan culture itself exists on a continuum with Christian culture. And indeed, it is the notion of mixing unlike things that gives the edition its force. In his prefatory poem, the physician Christopher Johnson plays throughout on the similarity between “seria” (serious things) and “feria” (festival) (sigs. Aiiiir–Aiiiiir); he encourages readers to see the seriousness in the elegiac mode, which was usually known for handling light or lower subjects. But the seriousness also proceeded from the effort it took to combine two cultures that were in many

¹⁴⁰ Dethick, “Epistola,” in *Feriae Sacrae, Octo Libris Comprehensae, in Quibus, Naturae, Tabularum, & Gratiae Leges Exprimuntur* (London, 1577), sig. Aiiir. References to this edition will appear in the text; translations are my own.

ways incompatible. In book 6, Dethick makes the most famous Roman poets speak a pastiche of their most famous lines, ceding authority away from their subject and toward his. He wishes Lucan “imbellis” (not warlike) and Juvenal more serious, criticizing the poet for whom all human affairs were simply an occasion for literary style (sigs. Oiiiiir–v). But like Golding’s effort in his translation of Ovid, and Calvin’s in his commentary on Galatians, Dethick’s effort to understand pagan cultures pays off in a more muscular, fortified Christianity that gains strength from engaging with and sometimes parodying pagan culture.

The edition itself was clearly tailored to Cecil’s interests in 1577. In the years following the Admonition controversy, he sought to advance the interests of moderation in all the areas of cultural production he influenced, which were many and included the university. But, in the last translation he produced, Golding moved away from Cecil’s moderate positions. His translating career went in the other direction, away from compromise and mixture and into the stratosphere of rationalism, when he took on a translation for the Sidney circle in 1587, Philippe de Mornay’s *Trewnesse of the Christian Religion*. This work represented a major statement of the Sidney circle’s views on different religions and their relationship to Christianity. It is not a work of moderation, which is understandable. Mornay narrowly escaped death on St. Bartholomew’s day and probably went on to compose all or part of the *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*. He was not interested in making concessions in religious matters, but he was interested in finding convincing ways to unite Christianity intellectually.

Even though the subtitle of this work states that it was written against “Atheists, Epicures, Paynims, Iewes, Mahumetists, and other Infidels,” it is actually an extended attempt to convince and convert them. In many ways, the *Trewnesse* is a throwback to

earlier, scholastic works that advertised themselves as handbooks for missionaries among the infidels. The most famous example is Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Contra Gentiles*, a four-book tome that seeks to confirm the truth of Christian doctrine without using revelation. This methodology held obvious allure for Christians embattled by competing sects and contentious, partisan debates. As Mornay says in his preface, this work is "more needfull now adaies (yea euen (which I am ashamed, to saie) among those which beare the name of Christians) than euer it was among the verie Heathen and Infidels."¹⁴¹ Some modern unbelievers seem to correspond to the "paynims" of the subtitle:

They thinke there is a God, and that of him man hath receiued an immortall soule: that God gouerneth all things, and that man ought to serue him. But forasmuch as they see both Gentiles and Iewes, Turkes and Christians in the world, and in diuerse nations diuerse Religions, whereof euery one thinketh he serueth God, and that he shall find saluation in his owne Religion: These (like men at a stoppe where many waies meet,) in steed of choosing the right way by the iudgement of reason, do stand still amazed, and in that amazement conclude that all comes to one, as who would say, that South and North lead both to one place. (sig. **iiiiv)

Mornay presents this portrait as one of false toleration; that is, these people confuse social customs with religious truth. Diversity represents, however, a fundamental status quo for the student of religions. Mornay's solution, the reliance on reason above all else, strikes me as anachronistic, a nostalgia for a scholastic *Summa* that would once and for all unite Jew and Gentile, Christian and unbeliever under the common umbrella of rational discourse.

But in this Mornay presents only one side of Calvin's tortured thinking about heathens and pagans. On the one hand, they are endowed with reason that does reveal God to them, albeit through natural means. On the other hand, they have rituals and customs that must somehow be assimilated, or avoided altogether. The practical side of Calvin's thinking

¹⁴¹ Mornay, *A Worke Concerning the Trewnesse of the Christian Religion*, trans. Philip Sidney and Arthur Golding (London, 1587), sig. **iiiir. Further citations of this work will appear in the text.

is largely absent from Mornay's treatise. He asks that we take the common nature of Gentile and Jew as the basis for his argument that they are equally capable of being moved by reason. He is not interested in asking for compromises with heathens. For example, in chapter 22 one finds the familiar Euhemeristic argument that the gods of the pagans were simply real men who had been deified (383). (This argument was notably absent from Golding's prefaces to Ovid.) In Mornay's work, Numa appears not as a religiously minded leader who helped his people but as a beguiler, a charlatan who pretended to learn from a witch the ceremonies he used to dazzle his subjects (380).¹⁴² The more rational of the Romans, such as Varro and Cicero, are adduced to argue for the absurdity of their nation's rituals. Mornay targets religious discipline for a severe assault; instead of engaging it, he sidesteps and condescends in most familiar ways. Mornay, Sidney, and Golding all must have felt that this approach was necessary to heal Christendom's divides: not cultural anthropology but geometrical certainty. Mornay attempted to reduce cultural complexity not get into the middle of it.

Indeed, he vilifies those who are overly fascinated by cultural customs on their own terms and look to find some common end in competing religious disciplines. His has none of the specificity of the work of his contemporary Jean Bodin, whose unpublished *Colloquium Heptaplomeres* contained highly evocative and particular accounts of religious practices and cultural customs. Mornay's is not a work of comparative religion as Bodin's is, but the fact that they were written nearly contemporaneously shows us that Mornay's was not the only game in town. And in fact, the most famous defender of the established church used methods more similar to Bodin than Mornay. Richard Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* is not afraid to discuss contentious matters of religious devotion in a highly specific, context-driven

¹⁴² Mornay's source was probably book 7 of St. Augustine's *City of God*; see *Of the Citie of God with the Learned Comments of Io. Lod. Viues*, trans. I. H. (London, 1610), 293–94.

manner. Hooker's work often pointedly addresses pagans and the relationship of pagan customs to the discipline of the early Christians. Paganism once again represented a challenge to the decorum of religious interpretation and practice. Literature of the 1590s reflected the fascination with pagan customs and their challenge to religious decorum and integrity. The next chapter examines William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Christopher Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* alongside Hooker's *Laws* and other contemporary texts that struggled to define pagans' place in Christian culture and society.

Chapter 3

Paganism, Festivity, and the Forms of Religious Discipline in Late Elizabethan England

This chapter examines notions of what constituted allowable “forms” of religious worship, and correlates those notions with literary works that similarly interrogate the problem of shifting and morphing forms. By the 1590s, arguments over form were especially important for defenders of the power of the established church to adapt mutable forms of worship to its particular circumstances. Similarly, the Ovidian fascination with formal ambiguity found expression in literary works that represented the consequences—social, aesthetic, religious—of a world in which the forms that governed daily life were not set but rather unstable and fluid. These processes often played out in terms of pagan inheritances, both in the religious sphere where pagan forms of worship were up for debate, and in the literary realm where classical genres provided complex underpinnings for early modern literature itself. This chapter shows that so much of what is distinctive about the literature of the 1590s—its portrayal of worlds alive to the senses, and their drawbacks—flowed from the origins of classical genres in pagan religious practices, coupled with the tense religious polemic that argued over the correct interpretation of these same pagan forms of worship.

In yoking together generic literary forms with forms of religious worship, I am arguing that there was an essential similarity between the way that the early modern world viewed both of them. Rosalie Colie’s argument several decades ago still seems to hold true, that the Renaissance found in “ancient culture . . . *structures* as well as *styles* to be imitated

in . . . humane letters.” But Colie also argued that our reliance on “forms and formulae” structures the way that we learn about and experience the world, so much so that “we often entirely fail to recognize them for what they are.”¹⁴³ The 1590s, however, was a decade in which writers drew attention to the forms that were providing the structure for their culture. And the forms of worship and devotion from the pagan world naturally interpenetrated both literary genres and ecclesiastical polemic. What I am examining is more than just a coincidence, though: if we ignore the developments of literary genres like pastoral in the 1590s then we will also miss the distinctions being made about the proper models of religious devotion. And the reason is that both literary genres and church history were converging around the correct interpretation of pagan religion, its myths and its cultural apparatus.

I. Richard Hooker and his Defense of Ritual

Richard Hooker’s work is responsible for an important English version of a powerful yet adaptable religious institution that could incorporate divergent human forms of worship and synthesize them with God’s numinous commands. This is the case because his vision of ecclesiastical polity allows for the mixture of ritual forms inherited by the modern church from earlier churches and even non-Christian religions. His view of pagan religious practices emerges especially in books 2–5 of his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, as he addresses the specific complaints of his opponents Thomas Cartwright and Walter Travers, who often cite historical examples to prove that the early church accepted nothing from Jews, Gentiles, and other non-Christians. Hooker delves into the same historical circumstances in order to show

¹⁴³ Colie, *The Resources of Kind: Genre-Theory in the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 4–5.

that while the early church did separate itself from other religions in order to maintain its internal coherence and laws, it was clear that the church rarely forbade the importation of the forms and practices of paganism and Judaism. The reason was simple, Hooker thought. While the visible, sensible church represents an earthly manifestation of god's eternal, spiritual church, the two can never fully co-exist, and so it was allowable for earthly churches to institute their own rules and customs according to the many sources of earthly wisdom that God had provided. In other words, if earthly churches were going to be sensible, they should embrace that very sensibleness. But they also have to accept the consequences and compromises that a visible church rooted in human customs entails. This compromise accompanied in the 1590s the uneasy acknowledgment that the imaginative church was subject to the debility and variety of the imagination itself.

The play of surfaces, forms, and materials is thus the most importance dimension of the late-Elizabethan engagement with pagan customs and the one that best locates that engagement within contemporary English religious and social experience. Whereas in the last chapter we saw Golding and his contemporaries utilizing inward-looking interpretive strategies that located the test of interpretation on and within the body of the Christian reader, in this chapter we will observe writers taking an interest in the externals of religious practice in an expansive and playful way. That is, they locate the test of interpretation on the surface, the part exposed to the judgment of society, but a part also conducive to ornamentation and expressions of decorous ritual.

My argument begins with Hooker himself and his theory of the proximity of different religious practices and their place in an autonomous religious community. As Achsah Guibbory has argued, "the very notions of harmony, community, and mixture were fraught

with danger” in the intellectual climate of the late-sixteenth century, on both sides of the ecclesiastical debate.¹⁴⁴ We have seen in the last chapter that those responding to Calvin, and even Calvin himself, often held complex positions regarding what kinds of religious mixtures were allowable and what kinds were not. Hooker falls on one end of the spectrum, clearly, but what kinds of mixture did he allow and advocate? The answer lies partially in Hooker’s dual visions of decorum and variety. The makeup of his ideal ecclesiastical community would be decorously mutable. He strongly believed in the decorum of ecclesiastical practices that conformed to the immediate needs of the ecclesiastical community.

Hooker’s sensible church takes as its basis the beauty of variety and the shifting forms that exist in the external world.¹⁴⁵ In book 1 of his *Laws*, he writes, “The general end of Gods externall working, is the exercise of his most glorious and most abundant virtue: Which abundance doth shew it self in varietie, and for that cause this varietie is oftentimes in scripture expressed by the name of *riches*.”¹⁴⁶ Later on, in book 3, Hooker links the variety of God’s ways to the variety of human customs. Instead of insisting on the exact historical parallels between early and modern Christians, Hooker thinks that “A more dutifull and religious way for us were to admire the wisdom of God, which shineth in the bewtiful varietie of all things, but most in the manifold and yet harmonious dissimilitude of those wayes, whereby his Church upon Earth is guided from age to age, throughout all generations of men” (1:253). In book 2 he writes, “The boundes of wisdom are large and within them

¹⁴⁴ Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community from Herbert to Milton: Literature, Religion, and Cultural Conflict in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 38.

¹⁴⁵ For Renaissance classicism defined in terms of variety and mutability, see Leonard Barkan’s *The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis and the Pursuit of Paganism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), especially chaps. 5–6.

¹⁴⁶ Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, in *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, gen. ed. W. Speed Hill, 6 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 1:61. All citations of the *Laws* are to this edition and will be cited in the text by volume and page number.

much is containd.” Accordingly, “As her waies are of sundry kinds, so her maner of teaching is not meereley one and the same” (1:147).

From here Hooker launches into a discussion of St. Paul’s thoughts on how Christians should relate to those of other religions. Paul was well-known for trying to “please all men” (1:148) in everything he did, and asked his followers to “*be inoffensive both to Jewes and Graecians*” (1:149). Hooker forms these statements into a general standard for Christian behavior. Arguing against those who would make scripture the absolute criterion of moral judgment, Hooker puts the case of early Christians who were charged with preaching to the heathens:

The Churches dispersed amongst the Heathen in the East part of the world, are by the Apostle S. Peter exhorted, to have their *conversation honest amongst the Gentilles, that they which spake evill of them as of evill doers, might by the good workes which they should see, glorifie God in the day of visitation. . . .* Seeing therefore this had beene a thing altogether impossible, but that infidels themselves did discern, in matters of life and conversation, when beleivers did well, and when otherwise; when they glorified their heavenly father, and when not: it followeth that some thinges wherein God is glorified, may be some other way knowne, then onely by the sacred Scripture; of which Scripture the Gentiles being utterly ignorant, did notwithstanding judge rightly of the qualitie of Christian mens actions. (1:149–50; italics in original)

This is an important passage early in Hooker’s work; “conversation” here means something like the manner of living in society and the world, or one’s actions among other people.

Having commerce with non-Christians provides a standard of behavior that expands beyond scriptural precedent.

Many of Hooker’s examples, following those of his opponents, come from the early church, when pagans and Christians still regularly mixed and rules governing their interactions were up for debate. In book 4 Hooker’s purpose is to argue that the reason some ceremonies were forbidden in the early church was not their similarity with heathen rituals,

but rather their absolute iniquity. For example, when it came to the injunction against cutting one's hair to mourn for the dead, Hooker writes, "The very light of nature it selfe was able to see herein a fault; that which those nations did use, having bene also in use with others, the auncient Romane lawes do forbid" (1:291–92). In other words, simple proximity to those of different religions was not the reason for the Levitical laws and prohibitions among the Jews. Rather, there were specific circumstances that led to those particular prohibitions. Hooker argues that nearness to heathens and their rituals is not in itself a cause of infection to the faithful. Certainly, some rituals practiced by non-Christians are alien to Christian doctrine, and those should be banned. But in things indifferent, similarity to those of other religions makes no difference among the faithful and is thus allowable. This familiar account of Hooker's view of ceremony points out his tolerance of the congruence of Christian, pagan, and Jewish "forms" of church polity and of worship.

But underlying this defense of external methods of worship is Hooker's evocation of a "sensible" church that relies on the objects of sense in order to communicate its doctrines. "Sundry sensible meanes," he writes, "have . . . seemed the fittest to make a deepe and a strong impression" (1:274). "We must not think," he goes on to say, "but that there is some ground of reason even in nature, whereby it commeth to passe that no nation under heaven either doth or ever did suffer publique actions which are of waight whether they be civil and temporall or els spiritual and sacred, to passe without some visible solemnitie" (ibid.). It is by this reasoning that Hooker contextualizes and mitigates what may seem to his contemporaries to be ridiculous or pointless rituals from other cultures. He cites both Roman and Hebrew civil and religious customs; indeed, in both civil and religious actions these rituals "have their necessary use and force." For support he quotes Pseudo-Dionysius: "*the sensible things*

which religion hath hallowed [τά μὲν αἰσθητῶς ἱερά], are resemblances framed according to things spiritually understood, whereunto they serve as a hand to lead and a way to direct” (ibid.). Numa Pompilius is also a representative of Hooker’s sensible church, he who commanded his priests to perform ceremonies with their right hands covered, signifying that the right hand is the seat of faithfulness and must be defended. At this moment, two of Hooker’s guiding ideas collide uneasily. On one side there is his rational historicism, his notion that past societies and cultures instituted laws and rituals to address specific circumstances and in the context of specific needs and values.¹⁴⁷ On the other side there is his Christian Platonism, his assurance that the sensible objects of religious worship lead the devotee toward the higher truths encountered on the rungs of an orderly universe.¹⁴⁸ As Debora Shuger has argued, this conjunction characterizes Hooker’s uneasy union between the sensible and the transcendent in his work. By defining the church as a body at once sensible and mystical, Hooker “posits an empirical association (a ‘visible body’) structured by non-empirical (‘mystical’) relations.”¹⁴⁹ This conflict recurs throughout the *Laws* and tends to crop up at the most important moments of Hooker’s argument.¹⁵⁰

But, when he has to argue a point closely, Hooker most often relies on the more familiar philosophy of Aristotle, especially his *Metaphysics* and *De Anima*. Much of

¹⁴⁷ For this aspect of his thought, see especially Debora Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics, and the Dominant Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), chap. 1.

¹⁴⁸ On Hooker’s Platonism, see W. J. Torrance Kirby, *Richard Hooker, Reformer and Platonist* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), chap. 3; and Feisal G. Mohamed, “Renaissance Thought on the Celestial Hierarchy: The Decline of a Tradition?” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 65 (2004): 564–68.

¹⁴⁹ Shuger, “‘Society Supernatural’: the Imagined Community of Hooker’s *Laws*,” in *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England*, ed. Claire McEachern and Debora Shuger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 128.

¹⁵⁰ William J. Bouwsma interprets Hooker’s thought in terms of the conflict in Plato’s own works between “philosophy,” the tendency to look for upward and transcendent truths, and “rhetoric,” the tendency to identify specific circumstances that generate contingent social and religious practices (“Hooker in the Context of European Cultural History,” in *Religion and Culture*, ed. McEachern and Shuger, 145–46).

Hooker's theory of the sensible church was founded on his understanding of the diversity of forms that give shape to the visible world. Hooker states, very nearly explicitly, that in this case he is not Platonizing: "we are not of opinion therefore, as some are, that nature in working hath before hir certaine exemplary draughts or patternes, which subsisting in the bosome of the Highest, and being thence discovered, she fixeth her eye upon them, as travelers by sea upon the pole-starre of the world, and that according thereunto she guideth her hand to worke by imitation" (1:66–67). Rather, Hooker follows Aristotle when he writes of works of nature that "do so necessarily observe their certaine lawes, that as long as they keepe those formes which give them their being, they cannot possiblie be apt or inclinable to do otherwise than they do" (1:67). His marginal note to the word "formes" in this passage states that "According to the diversitie of inward formes, things of the world are distinguished into their kinds." Hooker does not expand on this explanation by discussing Aristotle, but that is probably because the Aristotelian context would have been very familiar to his readers.

Aristotle famously disagreed with previous philosophers over the relationship between "form" and "matter." In book 1 of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle disagrees with Plato, who separated "form" from the matter that it shaped. "Yet what happens is the contrary," Aristotle writes. "For they make many things out of the matter, and the form generates only once, but what we observe is that one table is made from one matter, while the man who applies the form, though he is one, makes many tables."¹⁵¹ Because matter is mutable and therefore an underlying principle of differentiation, the forms join to the matter in many

¹⁵¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. W. D. Ross, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Bollingen Series 71, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1562. Further citations will appear in the text by page number alone, since the edition is paginated continuously through both volumes.

different ways. Renaissance commentators made it clear that this was a matter of disagreement between the two philosophers. Pedro da Fonseca's commentary on the *Metaphysics*, originally published in 1577, lists this passage as an "Impugnatio" (attack). Fonseca explains, "Ostendit Platonem non recte posuisse duo principia ex parte materiae, & unum ex parte formae: cum magis consentaneum esset, ut poneret duo ex parte formae, & unum ex parte materiae" (he claims that Plato did wrong in labeling matter as plural and form as singular; rather, it would have been better had he labeled form as plural and matter as singular).¹⁵² Later on in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle expands his disagreement and states clearly his stake in the debate: "Again it must be held to be impossible that the substance and that of which it is the substance should exist apart; how, therefore, can the Ideas, being the substances of things, exist apart?" (1567). While Hooker did not rely on Aristotle's hylomorphism in any systematic way, it clearly underpins his conception of the visible church that exists in a variety of forms and yet still teaches the fundamental matter of doctrine.

Aristotle's ideas also inform Hooker's discussion of the faculty of the imagination, which was crucial in his defense of religious rituals in the church.¹⁵³ Hooker cites Aristotle in book 5, when Hooker is defending the efficacy of religious rituals that rely on the senses. The imagination, he writes, takes in sensory data and stores it up in the memory (2:306–7). For support he cites Aristotle's *De Anima*, where Aristotle writes that thinking is a "form of imagination or [is] impossible without imagination" (642) and discusses the "faculty of thinking," which "thinks the forms in the images" (686). Hooker cites these passages in order

¹⁵² Fonseca, *Commentariorum in Libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis*, 4 vols. (1615; reprint, Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1964), 1:254; my translation.

¹⁵³ See Bouwsma, "Hooker in Context," 150–51.

to describe the necessity of external, sensible rituals for the conveyance of religious doctrine. The imagination is rooted in sensible images, and so relies on the rituals and practices that provide the forms, which in turn provide the basis for thought itself.

Hooker was thus a fairly traditional Aristotelian in his evocation of hylomorphism, the idea that matter is the basis for differentiation via formal qualities. He extends his hylomorphism into the social realm as well, as he must in order to defend the church rituals that were under attack. For Hooker, to defend ritual was first to recognize its basis in decorum, which itself flows from the created order of nature. Hooker's concept of decorum is inextricably linked to temporality and the expression of time-bound ethical principles. In book 5 of his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, he provides a brief history of human festivity and suggests why certain times and places are sacred and some are not. In previous chapters Hooker discusses the very practical details of his vision of church governance, but in chapter 69 he pauses to offer a general theory of ceremony, festival, and religious practices. His argument is that since God is infinite, "besides him all things are finite both in substance and in continuance" (2:359). Time is simply a measurement of the motion of the heavens and is only differentiated by the events that happen within the circular motion of years, days, and hours. So, even God's works occur at specific, differentiated times, and those times are specially hallowed by the occurrence of those works. Indeed, all places and all times are not alike in God's eyes, Hooker argues, but God has ordained that some be holy and some not. All of this follows from Hooker's original division of things into infinite and finite. Since we live in a finite, fractured world, our relationship with the infinite is necessarily mediated by our piecemeal experience of finite events that occur within time. The elevation of certain

events and places above others is an inevitable consequence of our separation from God on a hierarchy of essences.

Hooker continues to press the consequences of his argument into the realm of anthropology. His general theory of how differences come about also takes into account differences of human experience, with those differences also mandated by the specific, time-bound expression of divine authority. Ecclesiastes, he writes, “compareth herein not unfittlie the times of God with the persons of men.” Just as God separates some days from others, so too he separates men, even though their physical natures “are all one substance created of the earth” (2:362). In the next chapter, Hooker argues that the differentiation of days by God should find its counterpart in human efforts to provide a shape and a form for those days, “whereby their difference from other dayes maie be made sensible.” “The hallowinge of festival daies,” he writes, “must consist in the shape or countenance which wee put upon thaffaires that are incident upon those daies” (2:363). In other words, rituals and festivals only get their meaning from the “shape” that humans apply to the already holy, but time-bound, events that occur every year. And it is through this application that the needs of each ecclesiastical polity and each individual devotee gel into coherent communal structures.¹⁵⁴

Hooker’s explanation and defense of the celebration of festival days reach back to channel the experience of the ritual year in the late-medieval church. As Eamon Duffy argues of the record of pre-Reformation life produced by Roger Martin, a churchwarden in Suffolk, “what is striking . . . is the convergence between inner and outer, private and public, the timeless and meditative on one hand, the seasonal and external on the other.” In fact, he goes on to argue, “This integration of personal devotional gestures into the seasonal pattern of the

¹⁵⁴ On this point, see Shuger, “Society Supernatural”; she writes that Hooker’s “chapters on public worship celebrate the liturgical exfoliation of inwardness into community” (131).

liturgy was a universal feature of late medieval religion.”¹⁵⁵ Hooker believes that lay, Protestant parishioners could have such a fulfilling religious experience not by denying the efficacy of sacred space and time, but by acknowledging that the “difference” introduced by sacred time can allow for unique, personal expressions of devotion. Every festival day will be different because the “shape or countenance” that humans put on those days will also be different. Throughout book 5, Hooker continues to argue that human religious rituals at their best integrate the interior, meditative space of the individual with the variety of changing forms that nature, and God, have created.

This argument has important consequences for Hooker’s response to his opponents, especially when they argued that the rituals of the church were too similar to pagan rituals. One of Cartwright’s favorite authorities was Tertullian, and so Hooker often found himself responding to the patristic author’s arguments against mixing with pagan forms of worship. In book 2, Hooker describes the context of Tertullian’s *De Corona Militis* (On the Soldier’s Crown), which was written to argue that Christian soldiers should not wear crowns of flowers as the Roman soldiers did. The larger question turns on whether or not Christians can do things that are not expressly forbidden by scripture. Hooker eventually agrees with Tertullian that the long-standing custom of the church *not* to wear crowns should prohibit Christians from doing so, but Tertullian thinks that the laws contained in scripture extend even further into the realm of human action. Tertullian argues that the mere fact of using natural objects for religious expression is inherently wrong, while Hooker disagrees. Tertullian’s argument deserves to be quoted at length because of its importance as a negative

¹⁵⁵ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400–1580*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 39–40. For Martin’s account, see *The Spoil of Melford Church: The Reformation in a Suffolk Parish*, ed. David Dymond and Clive Paine (Ipswich: Salient Press, 1992).

criterion for Hooker's own argument and for its ramifications through English literary and religious culture in the 1590s:

Utere itaque floribus visu et odoratu, quorum sensuum fructus est; utere per oculos et nares, quorum sensuum membra sunt. Substantia tibi a Deo tradita est, habitus a saeculo, quanquam nec habitus extraordinarius ordinario usui obstrepat. Hoc sint tibi flores, et inserti, et innexi, et in filo, et in scirpo, quod liberi, quod soluti: spectaculi scilicet et spiraculi res. Coronam si forte fascem existimas florum per seriem comprehensorum, ut plures simul portes, ut omnibus pariter utaris, jam vero et in sinum conde, si tanta munditia est: in lectulum sparge, si tanta mollitia est: et in poculum crede, si tanta innocentia est, tot modis fruire, quot et sentis. Caeterum in capite quis sapor floris? quis coronae sensus? nisi vinculi tantum: quo neque color cernitur, neque odor ducitur, nec teneritas commendatur. Tam contra naturam est florem capite sectari, quam sonum nare. Omne autem quod contra naturam est, monstri meretur notam penes omnes, penes nos vero etiam elogium sacrilegii in Deum, naturae dominum et auctorem.

Quaeris igitur Dei legem? habes communem istam in publico mundi, in naturalibus tabulis, ad quas et Apostolus solet provocare, ut cum in velamine foeminae, *Nec natura vos*, inquit, *docet* (1 Cor. 11:14)? ut cum ad Romanos (Rom. 2:14), natura facere dicens nationes ea quae sunt legis, et legem naturalem suggerit, et naturam legalem.¹⁵⁶

[Use flowers thus for their sight and smell, which are the senses by which they should be experienced; use them through the eyes and nostrils, which are the instruments of those senses. The substance has been given to you by God, the way of using it you get from the world, although an extraordinary way of using flowers does not prevent their being enjoyed in the usual way. So, when flowers are inserted, tied up, in bands and woven together, let them be to you what they are when free and loose: things both to behold and to breathe in. You think that it is a crown, perhaps, when flowers are woven together in rows, so that you can carry many at once, and so you can enjoy them all at the same time. Well then, lay them in your lap, if there is so much purity in them. Throw them on your bed, if they are so soft. Put them in your cup, if they are so harmless, and enjoy them in as many ways as you have senses to enjoy them. But what is the savor of a flower on your head? What is the feeling of a crown except of its band? You cannot distinguish color with your head, nor can you smell it or feel its softness. It is just as much against nature for the head to desire a flower as it is for the nose to want sound. Everything that is against nature deserves to be labeled a monstrosity by all men, but for us especially it should be called a sacrilege against God, who is the creator and lord of nature.

¹⁵⁶ Tertullian, *De Corona Militis*, in *Patrologia Latina, Series Prima*, ed. J.-P. Migne, vol. 2 (Paris, 1844), cols. 82B–83B; my translation follows.

So, do you want to know God's law? You have it yourself in common with the rest of the world, in nature's tables, to which the Apostle was accustomed to call upon, as when he spoke of women's clothing, "Does not nature," he said, "teach you?" (1 Cor. 11:14); and when, addressing the Romans (Rom. 2:14), saying that the gentiles by nature do things that are lawful, he thus suggests a law that is natural, and a nature that is lawful.]

Tertullian claims that the natural law revealed in the gospels prohibits turning the materials of nature to other uses besides their original ones. Thus, because flowers appeal to the senses, to deprive them of this appeal is to behave contrary to nature and thus contrary to nature's law. And so even the very fact that the pagans turned natural objects into expressions of human hierarchies and distinctions was odious for Tertullian, who, Hooker writes, was overly attuned to all those who are "carnally minded" (1:296).

Hooker rejects Tertullian's logic in these passages. He argues that because Tertullian wrote this work in the "heate of distempered affection," one can often sense "imbecillitie" in the arguments. "Such is that argument whereby they that wore on their heads garlands, are charged as transgressors of natures lawe, and guiltie of sacrilege against God the Lord of nature, in as much as flowers in such sort worne, can neyther be smelt nor seene well by those that weare them: and God made flowers sweete and bewtifull, that being seene and smelt unto, they might so delight" (1:164–65). The reason this argument is flawed is the same that his main argument is flawed. Just because scripture says you cannot do something, that does not mean you can do only those things mentioned in scripture. Similarly, it is acceptable to use the natural objects of sense for other purposes than mere sensory enjoyment. In other words, Hooker saw no problem with importing sensible things into the rituals that expressed religious and cultural significance to a particular society.

Indeed, Hooker's view of "nature's law" also differed from Tertullian's. For Hooker, "natural law" was a combination of recognizing God's laws and allowing for the necessity of

humans to interpret and apply those laws to their own society. The reason that making crowns from flowers does not transgress natural law is that the act is not perverting nature itself, only changing the form of a natural object to express certain values and ideas. As Hooker would go on to argue in book 5, God himself had created differences in places and times, and thus had instituted the mechanism by which human societal values could take on a variety of forms and yet remain godly.

In book 4, Hooker's reaction against Tertullian again buttresses his argument for the "conformity" of English religious practices with those of other cultures. Tertullian, he points out, was a Montanist, which meant that he belonged to a group within the early Christian world that thought the church was making too many concessions to the pagans, conforming to some of their rituals. Hooker cites Cartwright's argument that some Councils of the early church had prohibited conformity with pagans. Cartwright wrote, "it was decreed in another Councell that they should not decke their houses with bay leaves and greene boughes, because the Pagans did use so, and that they should not rest from their labour those dayes that the Pagans did, that they should not keepe the first day of every month as they did" (1:295). Hooker responds by noting that in the early days of the church, the "constancy" of Christ's followers was of the utmost importance in maintaining cohesion. This was all the more important because his followers sometimes found it convenient to conform to pagan rituals:

his Saints, whom yet a naturall desire to save them selves from the flame might peradventure cause to joine with Pagans in externall customes, too far using the same as a cloake to conceale themselves in . . . for remedie hereof those lawes it might be were provided, which forbad that Christians shold deck their houses with boughes as the Pagans did use to do, or rest those festivall dayes whereon the Pagans rested, or celebrate such feastes as were, though not Heathnish, yet such that the simpler sort of Heathens might be beguiled in so thinking them. (1:295)

In other words, there was a necessity in those days to make ecclesiastical laws forbidding similitude of rituals between pagans and Christians. Tertullian, Hooker concludes, was simply overzealous in his persecution of those who accepted pagan rituals. He “over-often through discontentment carpeth injuriously” at the Catholic Church itself even when the church had already made laws forbidding conformity (1:296). If we accept that these laws continue to be in effect even after their circumstances have expired, we will have to conclude that people can be “condemned . . . only for using the ceremonies of a religion *contrary* unto their owne.” It will have to follow, he argues, that “seeing there is still betweene our religion and Paganisme the selfe same *contrarietie*, therefore we are still no lesse rebukeable, if we now decke our houses with boughes, or send Newyeares-gifts unto our friends, or feast on those days which the Gentils then did, or sit after prayer as they were accustomed?” (ibid.).¹⁵⁷

Hooker responds to Cartwright’s list of prohibitions from the early church with his own list of English customs that have little to do with the context of the early church. Indeed, his opponents conflate the “spiritual difference” between believers and unbelievers with the “difference in ceremonies,” even though the similar ceremonies may be far removed both in time and place (1:296). Just as Hooker notes that the very heavens themselves make it necessary that some times and places are more holy than others, so too has time invalidated the prohibitions against conformity with pagan ceremonies. The variety of forms of worship and religious practice mirrors the variety of sacred places and days that serve to express the needs of the particular communities that worship in those places and on those days. For Hooker, such variety ultimately is an expression of the “bewtifull varietie of all things”

¹⁵⁷ The giving of new year’s gifts was common. Even Arthur Golding styled his 1565 translation of the first four books of the *Metamorphoses* a “poore Neweyeres gift” in the dedication to his patron, the earl of Leicester (*The Fyrst Four Bookes of P. Ovidius Nasos Worke, intituled Metamorphosis*); see also Edwin Haviland Miller, “New Year’s Day Gift Books in the Sixteenth Century,” *Studies in Bibliography* 15 (1962): 233–41.

(1:253) that underlies religious worship itself. Hooker's variety structures an "imagined community" that at once exists in the prescribed forms of worship of a changing ecclesiastical institution and in the "affective interiority" of its members.¹⁵⁸

II. The Literature of Festivity

The arguments that Hooker used to respond to the anti-ritual faction in the church echoed among the literati of Elizabethan England. They too found that they had inherited forms and ideas from the pagan world and that their own artistic expressions were often couched in terms of foreign customs and practices. Rather than let that be a stumbling block, though, they found along with Hooker a way to turn pagan forms into representations of solidarity and community that also bolstered religious and civic society.

The mechanism by which such representations might create community and support was, however, hotly contested in the culture of the late-sixteenth century in England. Historians of festivity in this period have argued persuasively that attitudes toward the diversity of religious rituals and customs were largely mediated by ideological and intellectual disputes among Protestant authorities. Ronald Hutton concludes his study of the "ritual year" by arguing that the mutations of ceremony and local ritual had little to do with changes in the "basic structure" of English society from 1500 to 1700, which, "despite economic strains," "remained remarkably unchanging."¹⁵⁹ Rather, "religious and political factors" were responsible for the changes to and polarization of concepts of ceremony. Theological, ideological, and economic conflicts among the intellectual and social elites were

¹⁵⁸ Shuger, "'Society Supernatural,'" 136.

¹⁵⁹ Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 262; see also Keith Wrightson, "Mutualities and Obligations: Changing Social Relationships in Early Modern England," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 139 (2006): 157–94.

responsible for many changes to and suppressions of ritual celebrations.¹⁶⁰ He also argues that the perceived pagan inheritances of religious culture were not true inheritances but rather intellectual constructs by the literary and scholarly classes that accorded with the tastes of “sophisticated society.”¹⁶¹ Most of the correspondences between very old, pagan festivals and Christian ones were incidental, owing to the long accretion of ornaments and beautifications that adorned the medieval Church and medieval society.¹⁶²

Another historian of festivity, Francois Laroque, has reprinted and analyzed many accounts of rustic ceremonies from this period; his study makes two points that are especially important for this chapter. One is that early modern writers were interested in thinking about festivities and ceremonies in complex terms that noted the trans-cultural and trans-historical similarities between the forms of worship of disparate peoples.¹⁶³ The other is that literary representations of traditional ceremonies tended to be multivalent because early modern writers were conscious of the wide variety and diversity that religious practices could take on.¹⁶⁴ Almost every local instantiation of familiar popular rituals was different, he argues. But since early moderns were already conditioned to compare different rituals to others that were distant both in time and purpose, but similar in form, I would extend that point to the intellectual culture that appropriated classical forms.

Perhaps the most popular example of such a comparative frame of mind was Polydore Vergil’s in his *De Inventoribus Rerum*, a work that went through thirteen editions in the

¹⁶⁰ Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, 262.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 135–37; qtn. at 136.

¹⁶² Ibid., 50–68.

¹⁶³ Laroque, *Shakespeare’s Festive World: Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 158 and passim.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 11–12.

sixteenth-century. His juxtaposition of Christian and pagan habits consistently emphasizes their similarities. The structure of Vergil's discussion is usually the same in every chapter: he first discusses pagan manifestations of a given ritual or practice but then goes on to locate the origin further back in time in the Hebrew world. At the same time that he locates the provenance in Jewish practices, he also shows how similar rituals arose all over the ancient world. This kind of formalism demonstrates that any perceived borrowings of pagan by Christian culture were, actually, superficial and were based originally on Jewish dispensation, or else simply arose outside of that dispensation in other, pagan societies. Nevertheless, his work posed the fundamental question: is a ritual action affected by those who perform it, or can it simply be an example of an impulse found in human nature and tempered by social concerns? Certainly, his early chapter on the origin of religion argues that the development of religious ritual looks similar whether among pagans or not. In the beginning, he writes, people "began praising their first kings and giving them new honors until they made celestial beings of them."¹⁶⁵ Religion as we now think of it arose later, when some divine or quasi-divine figure teaches the people new rituals and ways of worshipping gods properly recognized as divine. Vergil thinks that "those who maintain that the gods have been worshipped since the beginning are therefore mistaken" (71). The "true God" similarly reveals how he wants humans to worship him. Among pagans there were several divinely inspired innovators who introduced rituals, among them Orpheus, Cadmus, and Numa.

This similarity extends to the development of religious ritual in both Christian and pagan societies. The nature of "religion" for Vergil pulls in two directions. According to

¹⁶⁵ Vergil, *On Discovery*, ed. and trans. Brian Copenhaver, I Tatti Renaissance Library 6 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 69. Further references will appear in the text.

Lactantius, it is the mechanism by which we are “bound and linked to God by this chain of piety.” But for Cicero, religion derives from “*relegere*, to go over,” denoting “those who carefully [*diligenter*] practiced and, as it were, went over everything having to do with the worship of the gods” (71). Yet, both definitions foreground careful (Cicero’s *diligenter*) practice and discipline as the hallmarks of modern religion, as opposed to uncivilized king worship. Vergil ends his account by writing that the “sons of Adam” first sacrificed to God, and that their sons sacrificed “without initiation in any rites until God established the priesthood” (75). In both cases, pagan and Judeo-Christian, there is a development from uninitiated, spontaneous worship to a mode of worship that employs rites dictated either by demigods, quasi-divine leaders, or even God himself.

Vergil also criticizes what he perceives as overly intrusive borrowings from pagan culture in Christian forms of worship. But his criticism is always suffused by the awareness that the origin of most religious customs came from the Hebrew world, and thus pagan developments were simply accretions on the Hebrew base. His chapter of “wreaths” begins by noting that “Moses . . . made many golden wreaths,” which Josephus links to priests’ vestments in his own day (303). The rest of the chapter is taken up by descriptions of wreaths in pagan culture, and ends by noting the similarity between them and the ones worn by English priests in their celebrations of feast days (309). “Heavens above,” he writes to his brother Gian Matteo, “how many practices of our own religion have been adopted and taken over from pagan ceremony” (17). But the thrust of the rest of his work is to show the similarities between Hebrew, pagan, and Christian rituals and to note that they all flowed from the dispensation given by God to the Jews. Indeed, Protestant or reforming Englishmen could take Vergil’s indictment of pagan similarity as a criticism of Catholicism and still note

that the less overt similarities between their own religion and paganism arose naturally. Ultimately, the comparative, synthetic spirit of the work triumphs over the critical edge that Vergil occasionally plays along; his book shows that rituals develop and adapt in complicated ways and often independently of each other. The result is an implicit argument that the forms of religious worship are often similar across cultures even if the intentions of their practitioners are wildly divergent.

Vergil's work thus contributed to the ambiguous status of ceremonies and pagan culture in the literary culture of the sixteenth-century. As classical culture and poetry became intensely fashionable in the 1590s, print was flooded with representations of the very rituals and ceremonies that Vergil had described, refracted through literary forms that gave the pagan world contemporary significance. Literary classicism gave many writers a way to channel the ecclesiastical and religious tensions of their moment into a world that was at once removed and relevant. It was removed in time and place; but it was close in the sense that the classical world could provide writers with a society steeped in highly formalized social and religious rituals that mediated their denizens' relationships with each other and with the natural world. If the religious conflicts of the 1590s were principally about what kind of form ecclesiastical polity would take, then that decade's classical fantasias were well equipped to reflect such conflicts in their depictions of a world of changing and unstable forms.

The intellectual and imaginative links between the literature of the 1590s—which often featured pagan gods and figures in starring roles—and the religious culture of the same time proved to be strong. Hooker had realized that his ecclesiastical community had to be built upon the affective responses of its members both to the sensible objects of worship and

to each other. This kind of devotion was very similar to the kind that writers were depicting through the popular literary forms of the decade. Giles Fletcher's sonnet sequence *Licia* expresses the link between erotic devotion and religious community and controversy enigmatically, in the playful manner of the distracted aristocrat who is wasting time writing frivolities. But there is a vein of religious controversy lurking, however ludic it might be, beneath the surface. Writing to his patron, Lady Molineux, he says, "the present jarre of this disagreeing age drive me into a fitte so melancholie, as I onely had leasure to growe passionate. And I see not why upon our dissentions, I may not sit downe idle, forsake my study, and goe sing of love, as well as our *Brownistes* forsake the Church, and write of malice."¹⁶⁶ Fletcher draws a tenuous comparison between himself and the separatists: just as they remove themselves from public life, so he removes himself from the same. But both are correctives to the "present jarre of this disagreeing age"; both are forms of retreat intended to ameliorate life in contentious times. What is needed, Fletcher implies, is some imaginative distance from the controversies consuming the church.

In fact, Fletcher sees the variety of interpretation that the vaguely classical, pagan world of the sonnet sequence affords as a virtue in a time in which seemingly every word was searched for its polemical significance. In his letter "To the Reader," Fletcher plays with those looking for specific interpretations of his verses:

Thue (Reader) take heede thou erre not, aesteeme *Love* as thou ought. If thou muse vvhat my *LICIA* is, take her to be some *Diana*, at the least chaste, or some *Minerva*, no *Venus*, fairer farre; it may be shee is Learnings image, or some heavenlie vvoonder, vvch the precisest may not mislike: perhaps under that name I have shadowed *Discipline*. It may be, I meane that kinde courtesie vvch I found at the Patronesse of these Poems; it may bee some Colledge; it may bee my conceit, and portende nothing: vvhat soever it be, if thou like it, take it. (sig. Br)

¹⁶⁶ Fletcher, *Licia, or Poems of Love* (London, 1593), sigs. A2r–v. Further citations of this edition appear in the text.

The term “precise” was another word for “puritan,” and C. S. Lewis suggests that by “*Discipline*” Fletcher intends Walter Travers’ *Defense of the Ecclesiastical Discipline* (1588), one of the sparks that kindled Hooker’s *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*.¹⁶⁷ Fletcher constructs, comically, a distinction between his own poetry and the more publicly minded religious polemic that was ongoing in print and in the universities. The variety inherent in the interpretive strategy is noteworthy: Fletcher makes sure not to fix his meaning, just as those to whom he refers were arguing strenuously about the meaning of symbols and images involved in religious devotion. But the very act of “shadowing,” or representing, “*Discipline*” in poetry was antithetical to Travers’ purpose. While he insisted on biblical literalism, Fletcher morphs Travers’ concept of Discipline into a literary conceit. The very structure of this allusive poetry is supposed to disperse interpretive authority; it is playful and various, and Fletcher mocks the “precisest” by implying that he has included allegories that will please them. Obviously he thinks that the most “precise” would not be interested in reading complicated representations of ideas masked by pagan gods.

The first poem in the collection enacts a distinction familiar from Hooker’s response to Tertullian’s *De Corona Militis*. The speaker writes that, in composing poems to Licia, he is building a church: “I build besides a Temple to your name, / Wherein my thoughtes shall daily sing your praise: / And will erect an aulter for the same.” But, he acknowledges that this human building would be an approximation of the natural, divine lodging of Licia’s virtue: “But heaven the Temple of your honor is, / Whose brasen toppes your worthie selfe made proude: / The ground an aulter, base for such a blisse / With pitie torne, because I sigh’d so loude.” On the contrary, it appears that nature herself is the only appropriate place

¹⁶⁷ Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, excluding Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), 493.

for the worship of Licia. But, as in the case of Tertullian's flowers, humans mangle the natural order by their attempts to turn it into art, or expressions of affective relationships. The speaker goes on, "And since my skill no worship can impart, / Make you an incense of my loving heart" (1). Religious ritual suffuses the language of *Licia* because the cultural and ecclesiastical tensions of the moment cannily inform the tensions that the speaker feels in creating imaginative art to please his beloved. On the one hand, building a temple or otherwise specifying a site of religious worship necessarily limits the illimitable and extensive virtue and grace that God, or the beloved, possesses. On the other hand, such manifestations of hierarchy are inescapable, and so human art falls back on a decorum that simultaneously comes from heaven and from human interpretations of the divine.

The erotic, passionate demands of lovers thus test the boundaries of decorous worship expressed through rituals. And there are few better representatives of this imaginative test in the 1590s than Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* and George Chapman's continuation. Chapman's continuation, especially, seems to have been influenced by Hooker's conceptions of ceremony and ritual. In an influential essay, D. J. Gordon links Chapman's goddess "Ceremony," who appears in the third sestiad, to Hooker's comments about ceremony in his *Laws*. Gordon adduces the passage in which Hooker maintains that no nation has ever allowed public actions of weight to pass without some sort of "visible solemnitie" (1:274). He argues that Chapman develops Hooker's notion of ceremony by calling his goddess "Thesmos," a Greek word that, in the sixteenth century, applied "specifically to institution, custom or divine rites."¹⁶⁸ Gordon also argues that Chapman is following Hooker's

¹⁶⁸ Gordon, "The Renaissance Poet as Classicist: Chapman's *Hero and Leander*," in *The Renaissance Imagination: Essays and Lectures by D. J. Gordon*, ed. Stephen Orgel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 112.

Aristotelian defense of ceremony as providing forms that shape the matter of devotion.¹⁶⁹

Chapman's continuation is meant, thus, to complete the intellectual enigma set up by Marlowe's original. The social and cultural function of religious formalism is of paramount importance to both Marlowe's and Chapman's poems, in which erotic love and over-busy imagination threaten the decorum of devotion. Marlowe's glee in questioning this decorum, and Chapman's in augmenting it, forms a crucial nexus for debates over the relationship between the imagination and religious culture in the 1590s.

Much of Marlowe's interest in these topics surely came from Musaeus's original poem, which, in its Hellenistic delight in a rhetorical effervescence that is also deeply skeptical, questions the efficacy of a religious polity to contain desire within social customs. The pagan social setting is thus unavoidably interwoven with the philosophical and religious complexities of the lovers' situation. It is also important that Renaissance authors generally thought that Musaeus was a very ancient author, predating even Homer. Thus, the rituals and religious tensions in the society depicted in his poem would have seemed foundational for Greek culture and also the transmission of religious values to later societies.¹⁷⁰ Ancient Sestos was indeed a society that made its sexual mores the stuff of religious ritual. At the beginning of Marlowe's poem, annual festival of Adonis forms the setting for Hero and Leander's meeting:

The men of wealthie *Sestos*, everie yeare,
(For his sake whom their goddesses held so deare,
Rose-cheekt *Adonis*) kept a solemne feast.
Thither resorted many a wandering guest,
To meet their loves; such as had none at all,

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 117.

¹⁷⁰ For an overview both of the poem's Hellenistic context and of its Renaissance reception, see Gordon Braden, *The Classics and English Renaissance Poetry: Three Case Studies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 55–82.

Came lovers home, from this great festivall.¹⁷¹
(1.91–96)

The festive atmosphere provides license for the dissolution of vows and the construction of new erotic relationships, as the ensuing action shows. Hero and Leander are both, of course, extremely beautiful. But it is Hero, more than Leander, who is clothed with external ornaments. Her clothes are, partially, the markers of her status as “*Venus nun*” (1.45), and representative of formal religion with its elaborate codes of symbolic imagery:

Upon her head she ware a myrtle wreath,
From whence her vaile reacht to the ground beneath.
Her vaile was artificial flowers and leaves,
Whose workmanship both man and beast deceaves.
(1.17–20)

But, like so many Renaissance objects of male desire, she is unattainable, ensconced in Venus’s temple, a virgin.

And yet Venus’s temple is adorned with representations of the lust and eroticism for which the Greek gods were known. “There might you see the gods in sundrie shapes, / Committing headdie ryots, incest, rapes” (1.143–44). For some critics, this juxtaposition between Hero’s purity and the very impure surroundings in Venus’s temple points out Marlowe’s ironic view of religion’s efficacy to restrain desire. Thus, William Keach argues that Marlowe portrays the lovers’ courtship ironically and “turns their wooing into something like a parody of formal religious ritual.”¹⁷² John Mills notes of Hero, “she is a devotee of sex, surrounded by the symbolic paraphernalia of sexuality, dedicated, as the word ‘nun’ implies,

¹⁷¹ Marlowe, *Hero and Leander*, in *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Fredson Bowers, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). I will cite both Marlowe’s and Chapman’s poems in the text from this edition by sestiad and line number.

¹⁷² Keach, “Marlowe’s Hero as ‘Venus’ Nun,” *English Literary Renaissance* 2 (1972): 315.

to chastity.”¹⁷³ More recently, Patrick Cheney extends the insight into the irony of the poem’s religious imagery to argue that Marlowe was reacting against the socially integrative vision of chastity and religious ritual found in Edmund Spenser’s works. Cheney sees the religious tensions as a critique of “England’s queen and her erotic cult of chastity.”¹⁷⁴ Marlowe’s challenges to religious ritual and religious formalism were indeed strong; and they took as their basis something like Hooker’s conception of a church founded in the visible and the sensory. Marlowe’s naturalist, materialist arguments against ritual, or at least those of Leander, in fact look strikingly similar to Hooker’s own musings about the role of the senses in religious practice. Neither Marlowe’s nor Hooker’s works are systematic; rather, they are both imaginative constructions that ruminate on the effects of variety and metamorphosis on a religious community. Chapman’s poem is more systematic, an attempt to tie all the threads of Marlowe’s poem together in a Hookerian knot, but Marlowe’s poem is powerful precisely because it leaves many supposed criticisms unresolved.

In the centerpiece of the first sestiad, Leander’s speech stands as a thorough indictment of the logic of religious devotion and ritual. His arguments question the way in which divine law becomes manifest in human societies, specifically through religious practices that claim to interpret divine law. These arguments are ultimately a recapitulation of sophisticated arguments over *physis* and *nomos*. From the point of view of *physis*, humans are governed by nature and ultimately unruly natural drives that resist the authority of law, or *nomos*. The adherents of *nomos*, however, maintain that positive law, whether divine or

¹⁷³ Mills, “The Courtship Ritual of Hero and Leander,” *English Literary Renaissance* 2 (1972): 300.

¹⁷⁴ Cheney, *Marlowe’s Counterfeit Profession: Ovid, Spenser, Counter-Nationhood* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 239.

human, represents the necessary compromises of progress and community.¹⁷⁵ Clever orators, however, could destabilize these general categories in various ways. Arthur Kinney has remarked on the interest generated in the 1590s by the “Second Sophistic,” a rhetorical movement of the first two centuries AD. The movement created a kind of “philosophic rhetoric” that endeavored to set mental traps for its audience through the deliberate confusion of categorical knowledge.¹⁷⁶ Nevertheless, orators employed this confusion to defend traditional customs and beliefs. *Hero and Leander*, however, yokes this style to Leander’s argument against Hero’s religious devotion. In both Marlowe’s and Musaeus’s versions, Leander produces a kind of philosophic rhetoric that forces custom and tradition to undermine Hero’s obedience to her formal religion. In Musaeus’s poem, when Leander wants to persuade Hero, it is to marry him, to replace one set of laws and rites with another:

Come, conduct the mystery, the marriage laws [*θεσμῶ*] of the goddess;
 It is not fitting a virgin attend on Aphrodite.
 Cypris takes no pleasure in virgins; if you are willing
 To learn the amorous laws [*θεσμῶ*] of the goddess, and her goodly rites,
 Here is our couch, our wedding; but you, if you love Cythereia,
 Embrace the tender law [*θεσμόν*] of the heart-beguiling Loves,
 And gather me up, your suppliant, and if you will, your husband.¹⁷⁷

Leander’s repetition of forms of “thesmos”—a flexible term that connotes divine, unwritten, spiritually binding law as opposed to human, written law—indicates his acknowledgement of the power of such unwritten laws to move Hero.¹⁷⁸ In effect, he is trying to suggest that these

¹⁷⁵ For an extensive discussion of this debate in ancient Greek philosophy, see W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 55–134. I rely on Guthrie’s discussion throughout my subsequent analysis.

¹⁷⁶ Kinney, *Humanist Poetics: Thought, Rhetoric, and Fiction in Sixteenth-Century England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), 317.

¹⁷⁷ Musaeus, *Hero and Leander*, ed. Thomas Gelzer, trans. Cedric Whitman, Loeb Classical Library 421 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 362–65.

unwritten laws should override her own vows, which correspond to formal religious discipline.

In Marlowe's version, Leander's famous speech takes a slightly different tack, though it similarly clothes its arguments for natural interest in the guise of the communal good.

Leander's key idea is that "use" should determine worth:

Vessels of Brasse oft handled, brightly shine,
What difference betwixt the richest mine
And basest mold, but use? for both not us'de,
Are of like worth. Then treasure is abus'de,
When misers keepe it; being put to lone,
In time it will returne us two for one.
(1.231–36)

For Leander, the ultimate value of things has to do with their use value, even their trade value. He envisions a society in which mutual trust guarantees the worth of things in their role as exchangeable commodities. That is, he removes Hero's worth from the province of the religious cloister and into the realm of society and commerce. But Leander goes on to divorce this concept of *nomos* as custom or tradition from *nomos* defined as a legally accepted norm of behavior. In some confused reasoning, he says,

This idoll which you terme *Virginitie*,
Is neither essence subject to the eie,
No, nor to any one exterior sence,
Nor hath it any place of residence,
Nor is't of earth or mold celestiall,
Or capable of any forme of at all.
(1.269–74)

¹⁷⁸ The flexibility of the term is nicely illustrated in the Latin translation by Andreas Papius in his *Dionysii Alexandrini De Situ Orbis Liber, Interprete Andrea Papio Gandensi; Musaei Hero et Leander, Eodem Interprete* (Antwerp, 1576), 164–66. Papius translates "thesmos" in the passage above as, in order of occurrence, "sacra," "leges," and "iura."

But several lines later, he chastises Hero for conforming to Venus's rites, which he terms "regular and formall puritie" (1.308). Clearly virginity is capable of a form. But the real question is whether Hero's worship of Venus is natural or merely a human institution.

His terming virginity an "idol" muddies the issue, especially because this usage is not what we would expect to find at the end of the sixteenth century. Vincenzo Cartari's *Le Immagini degli Dei Antichi*, translated into English by Richard Linche in 1599, begins by arguing that idolatry first came about because people mistakenly made their gods material:

For at the first, the corruptible sottishnesse, and faith wanting weaknesse of man was such, as illustrating the heauens and their reuolutions, the earth and her encrease, the sea with her strange courses, onely with the externall eies of their faces, not admitting the same to anie contemplation or soule obseruance, the vulgars, and such as blindfolded went groping vp and down in the dark for knowledge, were entangled in such an intricate garden and Labyrinth of error, that they were firmly persuaded that there was a god in this Statue, another in that picture of earth, stone, and other mettals, and oftentimes in painted Images: from whence it proceeded, that there were then in such friuolous and superstitious reuerence, so innumerable multitudes of gods among the auncients.¹⁷⁹

Leander's argument is that Hero's "virginity" is not a real idol because it cannot be perceived with the senses. In fact, he seems to be proposing that constructing a real idol might be better for Hero, since only that which can be touched, sensed, and exchanged has any value. In Leander's conceit, a different kind of idol would extend Hero's obligation laterally to her community and away from the exclusive, quasi-divine authority of "virginitie." The fluidity of nature is Leander's criterion of persuasion: since nature is in flux, the "regular and formall" cannot serve to contain it. Leander makes strange allies of custom and nature, suggesting that by placing something in the realm of custom one is bowing to the

¹⁷⁹ Linche, *The Fountaine of Ancient Fiction* (London, 1599), sig. Bv.

metamorphic nature of things because customs are based on “use,” which involves the changing values of objects.

Leander’s challenge to formal religious discipline is thus at once based on materialism and tradition. And Leander, as a pagan, makes a subtle, pagan argument about the nature of idolatry and religious ritual. As Cartari wrote, idols were simply representations of social phenomena and technological progress, to which the pagans gave physical form:

For not onely the seuerall humours of diuerse Nations, but euerie particular Cittie, caused their Image that they would worship, so to be framed, according as they were then to craue and request some especiall and extraordinarie boone of their wooden deities, or hauing already obtained it, intended thereby to manifest their thanksgiuing and gratefulnesse. And being (as it were) rockt asleep with the pleasing conceit of this their superstition, it grew so farre vpon them, that in the end they worshipped and deuoutly adored men like vnto themselues, such as were knowne to haue inuented and found out some speciall good and adiuvament for their easie and quiet liuing, or to haue (as it were) hewen out and forced from their deepe-searching capacities some strange and vncouth art, science, or profession.¹⁸⁰

For Leander, too, idols should concretize some sort of socially accepted set of values, such as marriage. He reasons much along the lines of Cartari’s pagans, that religion should revere deeds, fame, and social recognition:

What vertue is it, that is borne with us?
Much lesse can honour bee ascrib’d thereto,
Honour is purchas’d by the deedes wee do.
Beleeve me *Hero*, honour is not wone,
Untill some honourable deed be done.

(1.278–82)

Like a sophist, he praises social progress in the form of usages and customs set up by innovators and then developed through time.¹⁸¹ And like his counterpart in Musaeus’s poem, he thinks that this kind of idolatry would best express the “thesmos” of Venus’s worship. As

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., sigs. Bv–Biir.

¹⁸¹ See Guthrie, *History of Greek Philosophy*, 65–66.

Marlowe's Leander says, "Then shall you most resemble *Venus* Nun, / When *Venus* sweet rites are perform'd and done" (1.319–20).

This reasoning represents a significant challenge to an ecclesiastical community, because it denies the community autonomy in the form of internally maintained laws. For Leander, if a law does not conform to nature, or long-accepted custom, then it may be broken. Hooker had of course confronted this problem by arguing that an ecclesiastical polity must conform to nature in the form of sensible means of devotion; must conform to tradition in the form of principles handed down; but must also be free to establish its own rites that respond to the exigencies of social circumstances. The conflict inherent in Hero's chaste worship of Venus inside a temple that is marked with unchaste images is designed to point out the difficulty of maintaining internal religious laws in the face of social customs. The festive atmosphere of the poem makes it seem inevitable that Hero will forsake what Leander calls her "heedlesse oath" (1.294).

The recuperation of the material world into a ceremonial context was the object of Chapman's continuation of the poem. As Richard Neuse has argued, Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* actually shared much in common with the genre of works that he terms "the Ovidian banquet of sense," after Chapman's poem of the same name. He argues that "Ovid's banquet sets the Socratic banquet—as understood by Renaissance Platonists—on its head."¹⁸² The Ovidian poetry of the late-sixteenth century, he writes, "assumes the autonomy (more or less) of the senses and yet may imply that something like spirit can be sublimed from them."¹⁸³

¹⁸² Neuse, "Atheism and Some Functions of Myth in Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*," *Modern Language Quarterly* 31 (1970): 424; for similar arguments about the role of Ovidian narratives in the erotic epyllion, see Jim Ellis, *Sexuality and Citizenship: Metamorphosis in Elizabethan Erotic Verse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003); and Lynn Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹⁸³ Neuse, "Atheism and Some Functions of Myth," 425; see also Raymond B. Waddington, *The Mind's Empire: Myth and Form in George Chapman's Poems* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974),

Leander's arguments made an alliance between the materials of sensory perception and the licit social rituals through which physical longing was traditionally channeled. This argument is a subtle inversion of the usual defense of ritual, which begins with the endpoint and works down to matter. Leander implies that matter, and the value it obtains by exchange, actually structure religious discipline and make that discipline subservient to the social circumstances, manifest in custom or "use," in which it finds itself.

Chapman's poem, on the other hand, delocalizes ceremony and "thesmos," making them both deities outside of time that nevertheless provide the structuring form for the circumstances with which they interact. Chapman describes his "Thesme" as "the Deitie soveraigne / Of Customes and religious rites" (3.4–5). Immediately in the third sestiad, time and ceremony establish control over the events of the poem. In opposition to Leander's concept of "use" that governed time-bound customs, Chapman writes that time itself must be guided in order to legitimate action:

Times golden Thie
 Upholds the flowrie bodie of the earth,
 In sacred harmonie, and every birth
 Of men, and actions makes legitimate,
 Being usde aright; *The use of time is Fate.*
 (3.60–64)

Chapman's "Ceremony" then redirects the senses from social custom to divinely ordained and ordering authorities:

She led Religion; all her bodie was
 Cleere and transparent as the purest glasse:
 For she was all presented to the sence;
 Devotion, Order, State, and Reverence,
 Her shadowes were; Societie, Memorie;

 Her face was changeable to everie eie;

113–52; and Gerald Snare, *The Mystification of George Chapman* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989), 112–38.

One way lookt ill, another graciouslie;
Which while men viewd, they cheerfull were and holy:
But looking off, vicious, and melancholy:
The snakie paths to each observed law,
Did *Policie* in her broad bosome draw.
(3.117–21, 125–30)

The goddess chastises Leander's "violent love" (3.146) for "Not being with civill formes confirm'd and bounded, / For humane dignities and comforts founded" (3.151–52).

Ceremony urges that the civically and religiously instituted laws must form a part of conceptions of sacred law. And, importantly, she relies on the help of *Policie* to guide her followers through the "snakie paths to each observed law." *Policie* may be a glance at Hooker's own *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* in that both seek to reconcile instituted laws with the higher realm of sacred law. "Ceremony" acknowledges that observed law is often difficult to interpret and even more difficult to live within, especially when nature and custom must also be respected. But Chapman's goddess deals with the question of nature by remaining open to the senses; and she addresses the question of custom with her shadows, "Societie" and "Memorie."

Chapman's resolution of Leander's problematic linkage of materialism and custom results in a union between instituted law and sacred law by arguing that the difficulties of living in accordance with "observed laws" are necessitated by their complicated provenance from the divine. Channeled through the senses and further enmeshed in tradition, they require some sort of governing authority that mediates both, in this case the deities "Ceremony" and "Policie." In terms of the contemporary ecclesiastical conflicts of the 1590s, it made sense for these questions to be set against a classical, pagan backdrop since the problem of disciplines inherited from the classical world continued to needle and inflame English authors. Metamorphic, Ovidian materialism further proved to be a fruitful basis for

representation since the mutable materials of religious discipline were also a subject of wide debate. Alongside Ovid's transforming matter, Aristotelian hylomorphism explained how matter became endowed with form. This process of matter receiving form was crucial for defenders of religious discipline, and could be metaphorized in the process of fitting human law to sacred commands, or even in the imaginative dilation of the materials of worship into the rituals that gave them form. Classical genres thus attained a height of relevance to contemporary ecclesiastical debates precisely in proportion to their representation of the way that the unruly natural, material world interacts with civilizing forms of custom, law, and social circumstances.

III. Ancient and Early Modern Pastoral

While Ovidian strains of classical genre certainly were dominant in the decade, Virgilian pastoral also provided a source for complex representations of pagan religious practices. Just as the erotic epyllion dramatizes the tension between the rituals of religious and erotic devotion and the demands of transcendent, inexpressible virtue, the genre of the pastoral eclogue further heightens this tension by locating its rituals within a green world of natural immediacy. Michael Drayton's *Idea the Shepherds Garland*, like other poems of its kind, relies on the pagan world to provide the structure for its disaffected shepherds to rail against love and its enormous requirements. His eclogues are influenced primarily by Baptista Mantuanus's eclogues; Mantuan employed the eclogue form to criticize the Catholic Church and to delineate the kind of alternative ecclesiastical and social community that might replace the corruption of the church. Drayton inherits the multifaceted directives of this type of

poetry, and his shepherds, like those of his predecessors, are enmeshed in a world of rituals, sacrifices, and beautiful natural ornamentation.

Mantuan's collection was especially popular in sixteenth-century England, in part because of its critiques of papal excess, but also because of its earthy, rustic language and easy Latinity.¹⁸⁴ Examples abound of his adaptation of the trappings of classical religious ornamentation throughout his poetry. He often imitates Vergil's *Eclogues* and *Georgics*, both of which contain many examples of rustic gods and deities that intermingle with the shepherds' lives and thus structure the formal rituals that the shepherds institute in the countryside. As Mantuan's sixteenth-century editor Jodocus Badius noted, his third eclogue, which recounts a failed courtship, mines Vergil's fifth eclogue for details of the rituals with which the shepherds lament the death of Daphnis.¹⁸⁵ In Mantuan's poem, Amyntas asks Sylvanus, god of the forest, to keep the flowers safe for the funeral of Amyntas' beloved: "Ista precor domine, servate in funera nostra. / Tunc omnis spargatur humus, redolentia serta / Texite quae circa tumulum, supràque iacentem / Componantur heram" (fol. 21v) (Reserve (I pray you) them tyll néede / to decke the Herse withall / Of my swéete wench when she by stroke / of dreadfull death shall fall. / Then, then let all ye ground be strowde, /let garlands then be plide: / At tyme of death aud buriall of / my Loue hir Herse to hide).¹⁸⁶ In Vergil's poem, Menalcas makes promises to his beloved Daphnis in the form of rites that he will celebrate every year in his honor:

¹⁸⁴ See Lee Piepho, "Mantuan's Eclogues in the English Reformation," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 25 (1994): 623-32.

¹⁸⁵ Mantuanus, *Baptistae Mantuani Carmelitae Theologi Adolescentia seu Bucolica, Breuibis Iodoci Badij Commentarijs Illustrata* (London, 1590), fol. 22v. All quotations from Mantuan's poetry are from this edition and will be cited in the text.

¹⁸⁶ The translation is by George Turberville, in *The Eglogs of the Poet B. Mantuan Carmelitan, turned into English Verse* (London, 1567), fol. 23v. Translations will be from this edition and will be cited in the text.

haec tibi semper erunt, et cum sollemnia vota
reddemus Nymphis, et cum lustrabimus agros.
dum iuga montis aper, fluvios dum piscis amabit,
dumque thymo pascentur apes, dum rore cicadae,
semper honos nomenque tuum laudesque manebunt.
ut Baccho Cererique, tibi sic vota quotannis
agricolae facient: damnabis tu quoque votis.¹⁸⁷

[these rites will always be yours, when we make our traditional vows to the Nymphs, and when we cleanse the fields by sacrifice. While the boar seeks the mountains and the fish the streams, and while bees feed on honey and cicadas on dew, so long will your name, your renown, and your praise remain. Just as the farmers make yearly vows to Bacchus and Ceres, so they will to you, and you will bind them to those vows.]

Menalcas links the rites of Daphnis to the rustic version of the *ambarvalia*, the yearly celebration in May that honored Ceres with sacrifices and a procession around the crop-bearing fields.¹⁸⁸ The link between the harvest, Ceres, and religious ritual recurs in Vergil's *Georgics*, where in book 1 he instructs farmers how to praise the gods, especially those of the land:

in primis venerare deos, atque annua magnae
sacra refer Cereri laetis operatus in herbis
extremae sub casum hiemis, iam vere sereno.
.
neque ante
falcem maturis quisquam supponat aristis
quam Cereri torta redimitus tempora quercu
det motus inkompositos et carmina dicat.
(40)

[first and foremost, revere the gods, and give great Ceres her annual rites as you work in the field, and as winter now ends and already calm spring arrives. . . . And let no one put the scythe to the ripe corn until

¹⁸⁷ Vergil, *P. Vergili Maronis Opera*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 14. All quotations from Vergil's poetry are from this edition and will be cited in the text; translations are my own.

¹⁸⁸ The *Ambarvalia* was a traditional Roman festival that originated, according to Strabo, in the reign of Romulus and was celebrated by collegiate priests (*The Geography of Strabo*, ed. and trans. H. L. Jones, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 2 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923], 383 [5.3.2]).

he has encircled his brow with twisted oak leaves in honor of Ceres
and has sung her songs and danced unthinkingly.]

For Vergil's shepherds and farmers, their rustic religious customs are meant as memorials that bind together everyone in the countryside in mutual remembrance and celebration of the harvest. Just as human expressions of lament or joy are occasional, so too are nature's rhythms punctuated by moments of fruition or dearth. And as Hooker argued in book 5 of his *Laws*, it is precisely this circumscribed variety that provides the basis and rationale for religious rituals and the expression of human feelings in terms of the natural world.

The commentary on Vergil available in the Renaissance also tended to highlight holistic religious experience in the pastoral world. Anyone with Latin and a library could find exhaustive ancient and modern commentary in the great 1586 Basel edition of Vergil's works. This edition functioned as a kind of variorum; it included Servius's commentary as well as that of Pomponius Sabinus, Juan Luis Vives's Christian allegorical interpretation, and many others both classical and modern. Writing on *Eclogue 5*, Servius makes sure to explain the religious rites that Menalcas gives to Daphnis. By including descriptions of leaping satyrs, for example, Vergil meant that "sane ut in religionibus saltaretur: haec ratio est, quod nullam maiores nostri partem corporis esse voluerent, quae non sentiret religionem: nam cantus ad animum, saltatio ad mobilitatem pertinet corporis" (it is right that one should leap about when worshipping. The reason is, that our forefathers wished that every part of the body should feel religious worship; and so the song pertains to the mind and the movement to the body).¹⁸⁹ The unity produced by religious worship in the eclogues also extends to the community of the shepherds and indeed all living people. He writes that Bacchus and Ceres

¹⁸⁹ Servius's commentary appears in Vergil, *Publii Vergilii Maronis Opera, quae quidem extant, Omnia: cum Iustis et Doctis in Bucolica, Georgica, & Aeneida Commentariis* (Basel, 1586), col. 61. Further references to this edition will appear in the text, cited by column number; translations are my own.

“numina communia sunt mortalibus cunctis” (col. 61) (are deities that all mortals have in common), meaning that their effects, and their rites, are felt by everyone. This unifying force also applies to the human vows and contracts that deities can set up because of their ability to bind people together in mutual devotion. In the same eclogue, when Menalcas says that Daphnis will bind men to perform his rites, Servius explains:

cum tu deus praestare aliqua hominibus coeperis, obnoxios tibi eos facies ad vota solvenda: quae antequam solvantur, obligatos & quasi damnatos homines retinent. (col. 61)

[when you as a god begin to provide anything to men, you make them responsible to you that their vows are kept: so that until they are kept, they will oblige and bind men to their completion.]

The entire eclogue turns on the ability of the gods of nature to create lasting bonds in the community of shepherds and, indeed, all people. Vives applies this sense of binding and ceremony to the Christian church in his allegorical interpretation of the eclogue. The rites, he says, signify that “Sacrificium Christi, & cultus eius in Ecclesia, non accipiet finem, nisi cum humano genere, & vicibus naturae rerum” (col. 66) (Christ’s sacrifice, and its worship in the Church, will have no end, until the human race dies out or the nature of things changes). Furthermore, the gods Bacchus and Ceres, because they represent necessities common to all people, also prove necessary to the religious life of mankind in the Christian version of things: “ut diis maximè necessariis in vita, & sine quibus homines propagare non possunt aevum, ita & tibi fient vota” (ibid.) (vows will be made to you, as if to those gods that are of highest importance for life, and without which men are not able to reproduce). The upshot of both sets of commentary is that both Vives and Servius link the rituals of formal religion with the natural world, “natura rerum.”

Commentary on the *Eclogues* also included speculation on the origin of pastoral poetry itself. The origin is various, but the first story usually given connects pastoral poetry to the political and social circumstances of Greece after the Persian War.¹⁹⁰ This origin story probably appealed to Protestant writers looking to yoke visions of pastoral community to their vision of national identity united around common objects of devotion and obligation. Servius's relation of this story is brief, but Pomponius Sabinus expands on it in the prolegomena of the 1586 edition:

Xerxe per Graeciam furente, Graeci in diversa loca fugiŕe. Quo victo apud Marathonum, Laecedaemonii reversi in patriam, die forte quo festum Dianae Caryattidis erat, sacra fecerunt. Et quoniam virgines deerant, pastores ex vicinia contraxerunt, & per eos sacra expediverunt, adhibitis rusticis carminibus. Ritum autem sacrorum Bucolicon appellarunt, quod solum boum custodes interfuisse. (n.p.)

[When Xerxes was raging through Greece, the Greeks fled to different places. When he was defeated at Marathon and the Greeks returned to their country, it happened to be on a day sacred to Diana Caryatid, and so they performed her rituals. And because there were no virgins there, the shepherds came in from nearby and through them the rituals were carried out and their rustic songs were added to the rituals. They called this rite "Bucolic" because the cowherds were the only ones present.]

This story emphasizes the reunification of the country after international conflict through traditional sacred rites. Furthermore, the shepherds take it on themselves not only to perform the ceremonies but also to add their own voices to them. There is a participatory dimension to this story that must have appealed to early modern authors of pastoral, not to mention Vergil himself. Pastoral poetry was thus meant, from its inception, to integrate a society in turmoil under the auspices of mutable rites of religious devotion. Despite the tendency of the pastoral genre in the Renaissance to depict the lone intellectual exiled from power, the genre

¹⁹⁰ Even though it was widely repeated in the early modern period, this origin story is probably fallacious; see Richmond Y. Hathorn, "The Ritual Origin of Pastoral," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 92 (1961): 233–34.

was also concerned with the reintegration of a society under attack, with the shepherds leading the unification through their unique perspective and poetry.¹⁹¹ The pastoral genre is also partially a mixed one, in that it mixes the mystical and sacred ceremonies with the humble strains of shepherds' music, the "sollemnia vota" alongside the "motus incompositos" of Vergil's shepherds and farmers.

It was easy, therefore, for early modern authors to link Vergil's sense of licit social and religious mixture to a critique of exclusive, totalizing systems of religious worship. Mantuan turned Vergil's ideal, rustic nostalgia into a critique of modern, unidirectional systems of gift giving and ecclesiastical obligation. In his third eclogue, Fortunatus laments that, these days, his innamoratas all seem to prefer gold to garlands:

Quisquis amat, dominae munuscula mittat oportet.
 Tu verò, cui vix tectum fortuna reliquit,
 Sub quo luce habitat, sub quo pernoctat egestas,
 Quid poteris cupidae gratum donare puellae?
 Mittere mala decem satis esse solebat amanti.
 Purpurei [sic] flores: & raptus ab arbore nidus,
 Gramen odoriferum, memini quo tempore magnae
 Credebantur opes: ventum est a gramine ad aurum.
 Regia res amor est: hac tempestate recessit
 Mos vetus, & quaedam mala lex inolevit amandi.

(fol. 20v)

[Who so doth loue, vnto his Lasse
 must many presents sende:
 But thou whom scarce a house to dwel
 would cruell Fortune lende:
 Where day & night is want of wealth
 and lacke of golden sée:
 How canst thou shift to send thy Trull
 ought that may gratefull bée?
 Eare this suffisde vnto a Mayde
 ten appels gay to bring,
 A Garland freshe of fragrant floures,

¹⁹¹ For the humanist construction of pastoral as "a metaphor for the condition of the writer-intellectual," see Annabel Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valéry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), chap. 2, qtn. at 133.

a Neast of byrdes to syng.
 I knew when in as great a price
 the countrie maydes did holde
 A Garland as a better gyfte:
 but now from grasse to golde
 They are ascended, Loue is now
 become a stately thing:
 The auncient custome is decayde
 new lawes do dayly spring
 As touching trade of gréedy Loue,
 they gape for greater gayne.]

(fol. 22r)

In later poems, Mantuan associates this loss of ancient custom with the new order of greedy and acquisitive shepherds, who represent the Catholic Church. In eclogue 8, Mantuan reveals the “Virgin” as the true ruler over nature and the shepherds, and in eclogue 9 he goes on to associate corrupt churchmen with the misuse and greedy exploitation of the bounty of the rustic landscape. While the Virgin exists easily side-by-side with the shepherd’s pagan customs, the greedy pastors actually upset the natural order through subservience to Rome, symbolized by the foreign animals that intrude upon the calm landscape of the eclogues. Thus, without the informing order of the social and religious devotional rituals that both physically and symbolically keep natural variety in check, the earth brings forth new, horrible forms: “Saepè etiam miris apparent monstra figuris, / Quae tellus affecta malis influxibus edit” (fol. 74v) (And oftentimes appear / fell ugle shapes to sight) (fol . 89v). In the hands of corrupt priests, rituals are no more than idolatry, as Faustus says:

Fama est, Aegyptum coluisse animalia quaedam:
 Et pro numinibus multas habuisse ferarum.
 Ista supersitio minor est quàm nostra ferarum
 Hic aras habet omne genus, contraria certè
 Naturae res, atque deo

(fol. 75r)

[In *Aegypt* men report
 they honourd certaine beasts

And sundrie coumpted Gods to be
with pompe and solemne feasts.
That superstition was
deseruing lesser blame
Than ours, for we to euey beast
a seuerall Altar frame:
A thing contrary quite
to God, and lawes of kinde.]

(fols. 89v–90r)

Mantuan's shepherds decry the indiscriminate application of ritual observances to the great variety of the natural world. In Mantuan's ideal version of ceremonial society, however, the Virgin subsumes and controls the wildness of Ceres, and ritualistic practices bind humans through mutual vows and gifts that are given at specific times, instead of binding them to the "shapes" generated indiscriminately in nature.

Drayton was no Carmelite friar like Mantuan, but he did find something attractive in Mantuan's vision of a community of shepherds united around the structuring rituals of the landscape. The question throughout Drayton's *Shepherds Garland* is similar to that of Mantuan's poetry: what purpose do the rituals, vows, and sacrifices serve? The shepherds criticize uncaring lovers and the corruption of the modern world while praising their patroness, all against the backdrop of a highly ritualized, rustic society. The classical rituals that Drayton inherited from Vergil, filtered through Mantuan and Spenser, serve a similar purpose to those in his predecessors' poetry: they associate the occasional outpourings of human devotion with the festival calendar and the "garlands" that represented human art applied to natural variety. When classical authors such as Pliny the Elder remarked on the origins and significance of wreaths, crowns, and garlands, it was often accompanied by the uneasy delineation of licit natural, ceremonial objects from the accretions of human pride and affectation that attach to those same ceremonial objects. Pliny notes that flowers are

representative of ephemerality, perfect for expressions of temporary, ceremonial rites. As Philemon Holland translates:

whereas she [Nature] hath given unto those fruits of the earth which serve for necessities and the sustentation of man, long life and a kind of perpetuities, even to last yeares, and hundreds of yeares; these flowers of pleasure and delight, good only to content the eye or please the sense of smelling, shee would have to live and die in one day.¹⁹²

Originally, garlands were very small and made of flowers and leaves; they were claimed by priests for their rituals and by military commanders for their triumphal processions. Soon, though, the tastes of civilized society demanded artificial flowers made from silver and gold. Flowers and garlands became prizes in the games, and “those Chaplets wone and gotten at the solemne Games for some worthie feats of activities performed, caried alwaies the greater credit & authoritie.”¹⁹³ They became markers of status and authority, and yet Pliny observes that Roman laws were very clear that “such Guirlands otherwise though they were not wone at games of prize, but only made for pleasure and pastime, might not come abroad ordinarily, nor bee commonly worne; for the law was very strict and severe in this case.” Indeed, throughout his *Natural History* Pliny addresses the relationship between original artistic inventions that benefited the public and their subsequent degradation into private status symbols.¹⁹⁴ This familiar narrative of natural objects declining to human vanity, and their regulation by “discipline and severitie,”¹⁹⁵ helped construct Drayton’s position on natural rituals in his eclogues. His shepherds’ garlands represent a Protestant compromise between

¹⁹² Pliny the Elder, *The Historie of the World*, trans. Philemon Holland, 2nd Tome (London, 1601), 80 (book 21, chap. 1).

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 81 (book 21, chap. 3).

¹⁹⁴ See Leonard Barkan, *Unearthing the Past: Archaeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 71.

¹⁹⁵ Pliny, *Historie*, 81.

licit ceremonial outpourings for public figures on the one hand, and, on the other, the austere limitation of ceremonial trappings to garlands of real flowers, awarded for virtuous reasons and inextricably linked to religious devotion.

Drayton's garlands thus solemnize the community of shepherds by suggesting the affinity between the natural world and the social and religious order to which they belong. The shepherds live in the country, and so their expressions of religious devotion are similar to those over which Cartwright and Hooker, as well as Tertullian, argued in an ecclesiastical context. In part these practices, such as garlanding and gift-giving, are a kind of native English nostalgia, but they are also inherited directly from the rustic piety of classical pastoral poetry. To suggest that these rituals have some significance for sixteenth-century English Protestants, Drayton, like Hooker, must defend them in terms of their formal qualities and the capacity of their "forms" to change and adapt. And so Drayton conjoins the word "idea" with the word "garland" in his title in order to emphasize the variety of devotional forms that his poetry depicts.

The philosophical and literary significance of the word "idea" is, however, murky throughout. "Idea" could be the shepherd's garland itself, and thus represent a human, attainable goal that the shepherds aspire to, the recognition that would come in the form of a poetic or pastoral prize. Indeed, allegorically Idea probably stood in for Anne Goodere, the daughter of Drayton's childhood patron. However, "idea" could also represent a metaphorical, or metaphysical, kind of garland that is not available to the natural, rustic world that the shepherds inhabit. Drayton's enigmatic name for his collection thus partially recuperates the contentions between Aristotelian and Platonic "forms." As a real woman, Idea is often scornful of the shepherd's attempts to make "trophies" for her out of the

materials of the natural world. So, she comes to represent the neo-Platonic insistence on the ideal, the totalizing Form that provides an unattainable pattern for material objects, to which they never fully join; but she also represents the mutable forms that proceed from the natural world. The shepherds make things for her and the other objects of their affections, fashioning both physical sacrifices and garlands as well as poetic praise.

Because of the ambivalence regarding Idea's significance, the poems continually vacillate on the value of ritual ornamentation, which is often channeled through the practice of garlanding and sacrificing and often associated with the value of the shepherds' songs themselves. The first eclogue recounts Rowland's efforts to fashion an acceptable gift for his mistress, and the difficulty of doing so. His pleas take the form of religious rituals: "And let those prayers vvhich I shall make to thee, / Be in thy sight perfumed sacrifice: / Let smokie sighes be pledges of contrition, / For follies past to make my soules submission."¹⁹⁶ The shepherds also apply the language of sacrifice to their praise of "Beta," "The Queene of Virgins" (15), a stand-in for Queen Elizabeth. Perkin ends his praise by asking for yearly observance of her sacred place in the shepherds' world: "*Beta* long may thine Altars smoke, with yeerely sacrifice, / And long thy sacred Temples may their Saboths solemnize" (18). The closing motto of the eclogue, in the words of Ovid, promises, "Ipse ego thura dabo, fumosis candidus aris: / Ipse feram ante tuos munera vota pedes" (19) (I myself, standing in white in front of your smoking altars, will provide incense; and I will place votive offerings before your feet). This language was familiar from Virgil's *Eclogues*. In his eighth eclogue, burning incense on altars is also a way of praising one's beloved: "Effer aquam et molli cinge haec altaria vitta / verbenasque adole pinguis et mascula tura, / coniugis ut magicis sanos

¹⁹⁶ Drayton, *Idea the Shepherds Garland Fashioned in Nine Eglogs: Rowlands Sacrifice to the Nine Muses* (London, 1593), 3. Further references will appear in the text.

avertere sacris / experiar sensus” (22) (Bring water and surround these altars with soft bands, and burn rich boughs and incense, so that I may try to change the sober mood of my beloved with these magical rites). Just as in Virgil’s poem, the shepherds employ their “magic rites” in a kind of hopeful vein, hoping to use natural, ritual magic to effect change in their beloved, or to worship some quasi-divine entity with appropriate and decorous human rites.

As in many of Mantuan’s poems, Drayton’s shepherds often rely on the ornamentation they gather from the natural world in order to express communal, festive values. Partly this is native, English tradition and partly it has been gleaned from classical culture. In Drayton’s second eclogue, the shepherds debate the power of poetry to translate divinity into the objects of sense and experience. The young shepherd Motto asks of divine poetry,

Who doth not helpe to deck thy holy Shrine,
With Mirtle, and triumphant Lawrell tree?
Who will not say that thou art most diuine?
Or who doth not confesse thy deitie?

(9)

The traditional reward for poetic achievement is imagined to be coterminous with the rustic environment that the shepherds inhabit. They are rewarded not with gold, but with leaves from the trees that surround them. But as the older, wiser Wynken laments, poetry is not often rewarded even with this kind of social recognition. Indeed, Motto forsakes “his companions and their flocks, / And casts his gayest garland at his feete” (10).

Idea, though, inspires the shepherds to set up elaborate ornamental rituals to express their devotion to her. When they compose poetry to her, “Thy Temples then shall with greene bayes be dight” (31). In Rowland’s song, Idea appears as a Temple, built by heaven as a sacred space of religious devotion:

And those fayre Iuorie columnes which vpreare,
That Temple built by heauens Geometrie,
And holiest Flamynes sacrificen theare,
Vnto that heauenly Queene of Chastitie,
Where vertues burning lamps can neuer quenched be.
(32)

Like Fletcher's Licia, Idea is a "Temple," a sacred space and a repository of sacrifices made by priests especially devoted to its goddess. The physical "Idea" demands formal rituals of worship; she has been formed through geometry and thus demands the physical manifestations of recurring worship. But, as Motto points out, "She sees not shepheard, no she will not see, / her rarest vertues blazoned by thy quill, / Nor knowes the effect the same hath wrought in thee" (35). On some level, there is a disjunction between the temple and the goddess. She either does not need or does not care for the devotional practices of the shepherds and "holiest Flamynes."

This is not the case, however, for "Pandora" in the sixth eclogue, who probably represents the countess of Pembroke and who delights in the kinds of ritual recognitions that Idea scorns. Perkin evokes her as a bedecked goddess of nature and poetry:

The Graces twisting garlands for thy head,
Thy Iuorie temples deckt with rarest flowers,
Their rootes refreshed with diuine showers,
Thy browes with mirtle all inueloped,
shepheards erecting trophies to thy praise,
lauding thy name in songs and heauenly laies.
(41)

Pandora ends up as Britain's patron goddess. This is Drayton's attempt to translate the classical customs (the garlands, the temples decked with flowers, the brows encircled with myrtle) into British customs. In his and his shepherds' opinion, the glory of the nation comes, at least, partially, from the kind of decorous ornamentation that is represented in and by poetry itself, and by which extends the nation's fame across the waters.

And indeed, in the next poem Drayton seems to suggest that the reason these rituals might easily be translated into a British context is because of their derivation from the eternal rhythms of the natural world. Eclogue 7 is partially a debate between an *allegro* and a *penseroso*, with the youthful Batte reveling in the fecundity of the natural world in the opening stanzas:

See how faire *Flora* decks our fields with flowers,
and clothes our groues in gaudie summers greene,
And wanton *Uer* distils rose-water showers,
to welcome *Ceres*, haruests hallowed Queene,
Who layes abroad her louely sun-shine haire,
Crown'd with great garlands of her golden eares.
(45)

For Batte, the change of the seasons provides a rationale for festivity and celebration. In his personified nature, Ceres wears garlands and Flora “decks” the fields with flowers much like the temples decked with flowers and leaves in earlier poems. In Ovid’s account in his *Fasti*, Flora represents physical, expansive nature that is common to all; thus, she is worshipped in rituals that partake of cyclical, ephemeral, and ultimately comic natural processes. As Ovid writes,

non ex difficili causa petita subest.
non est de tetricis, non est de magna professis,
vult sua plebeio sacra patere choro,
et monet aetatis specie, dum floreat, uti.¹⁹⁷

[She is none of your glum, none of your high-flown ones: she wishes her rites to be open to the common herd; and she wants us to use life’s flower, while it still blooms.]

Batte invokes Flora and Ceres because they link natural cycles that the shepherds observe with formal rituals that are open to all. The concept that nature was there to be used also took on political and social connotations in Ovid’s poem. Flora’s games, he writes, were set up to

¹⁹⁷ Ovid, *Fasti*, ed. and trans. James George Frazer, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951), 286–87.

mark the occasion when the Publician consuls defended the integrity of public land against the encroachment of unlawful private wealth. Says Flora, “vindice servabat nullo sua publica volgus” (Common folk had no champion to protect their share in public property).¹⁹⁸ Batte, too, celebrates the common people and their land. Indeed, his invocation of the pagan deities accords with contemporary accounts of harvest festivals that described the ceremonies in terms of their symbolic significance. The German traveler Paul Hentzner described such a ritual in 1598: “their last load of corn they crown with flowers, having besides an image richly dressed, by which perhaps they would signify Ceres.”¹⁹⁹ Even though Borrill thinks Batte is naïve, he too thinks that nature should direct the shepherd’s mind, but toward the discovery of “What sundry vertues hearbs and flowres doe yeeld” (46). According to him, Batte should “learne the shepheards nice astrolobie [sic], / To know the Planets mooving in the skie” (ibid.). They are really talking about the same thing, the changing of the seasons that form the basis for the communal life of the shepherds. They simply disagree about the form that the knowledge of nature should take.

The expressions of love and devotion that flow from and are structured by natural objects become even more fraught with tension and significance in the last two eclogues. One of the running themes of this pastoral world is the rustic immediacy of the shepherds’ expressions of religious and social devotion. Their temples are more often decked with flowers than with gold, and the rewards of good poetry are more often myrtle than monetary. Nature provides them with their structuring rituals and rewards. In the eighth eclogue, Gorbo recounts the “golden age” as a rebuke to those in his own time who write for money and fame. In familiar imagery, he says,

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 280–81.

¹⁹⁹ Hentzner, *A Journey into England in the Year 1598*, cited in Laroque, *Shakespeare’s Festive World*, 158.

The tender grasse was then the softest bed,
the pleasant'st shades were deem'd the stateliest hals,
No belly-god with *Bacchus* banqueted,
nor paynted ragges then couered rotten wals.

Then simple loue with simple vertue way'd,
flowers the fauours which true fayth reuayled,
Kindnes with kindnes was againe repay'd,
with sweetest kisses couenants were sealed.

(57)

The point is that in this time people truly did live according to nature in that they allowed nature to structure their social relationships. “Flowers” were payment and “kisses” were contracts. But the deeper significance is that the natural world acted as a basis and a justification for the expression of social rituals that governed affective relationships. To be a good shepherd, Gorbo implies, one has to know about the natural world and how it works, and especially how it might serve as an alternative standard to worldly ambition and honor-mongering.

The upshot of this pastoral philosophy for Drayton’s poem is that such immediate links between the natural world and human society do not always function as neat, efficacious units of devotional expression. Virgil’s shepherds also often felt “displaced from a simpler mode of existence,” a realization that accompanied a kind of alienation from the natural rituals that constituted pastoral virtue.²⁰⁰ The ninth eclogue is Rowland’s long lament that Idea does not give his beautiful, natural ornaments their due regard. He says,

Those gorgeous garlands and those goodly flowers,
wherewith I crown'd her tresses in the prime,
She most abhors, and shuns those pleasant bowers,
made to disport her in the summer time:
She hates the sports and pastimes I inuent,
And as the toade, flies all my meriment.

(68)

²⁰⁰ Judith Haber, *Pastoral and the Poetics of Self-Contradiction: Theocritus to Marvell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 37.

This passage, near the end of the entire collection, brings together many of the ritualistic themes into a bitter denouement. Shepherds' arts are only those that involve making beautiful things out of nature; they follow natural rhythms in their customs and in their "sports and pastimes." The pastoral world, whether it be the world of Virgil, Mantuan, or Drayton, is alive with religious actions and significance. Altars smoke, yearly vows are made, and garlands signify the special significance of time-bound celebrations. Idea, it seems, does not acknowledge these as markers of religious devotion. She is like those whom Fletcher called the "precisest," who scorn the ornaments and trappings of pagan religious celebrations because of their narrow interpretations. Idea, too, "stops her eares as Adder to the charmes" (69). Rowland certainly, and Drayton perhaps, thinks that Idea is acting against her own best interests here. Idea seems at once formless and the pinnacle of unattainable form. She certainly inspires the shepherds to play with the variety of nature to express their love. But, Idea would be better served if she condescended to enjoy natural beauty and participate in the expressions of time-bound, because mortal, devotion. What the shepherds most desire is the union of their rustic lifestyle with some higher realm of significance and meaning, the union of the sensible expressions of devotion with the mystical realm of "ideas" and forms. If "Idea" can be said to represent religious devotion, or even the church itself, she is rather harsh and dismissive of beauty, and yet inspires her worshippers to invent beautiful things. But without the informing presence of Idea, the shepherds' world becomes incoherent; each shepherd, without his beloved, forgets his flock and his friends.

If there is religious allegory here, it seems to be that the shepherds' plain way of life is meant as a test for the notion that social and religious rituals—whether English, pagan, or a combination—might bolster divinely ordained social order in the human realm through their

presentation of natural objects of sense in devotional contexts. The plainness of the shepherds' lives surely was meant as a critique of Catholic excess, as was common in Protestant pastoral. But there is also a positive dimension for English society. The natural objects that the shepherds command and change with their art serve to bind the members of the pastoral community in mutual remembrance and effort. "Idea" is portrayed as too singular, too unwilling to accept that the variety of devotional expression can actually approach the transcendent "form" that she represents. If "the shepherds garland" represents the decorous mutability of human expressions of religious and social devotion, then "Idea" represents the difficulty of such various rituals to appropriately convey their participants into mystical transcendence. This is a distinctly Protestant formulation of the problem of religious ritual; Mantuan certainly does not invent a figure as austere as "Idea." His "Virgin" exists easily beside Ceres and Bacchus, the classical instantiations of festival. Drayton's poems do not possess the "easy primacy" of previous pastoral poetry; the rustic rituals address a world outside the pastoral one, a higher realm of court, society, and even church.²⁰¹ Nevertheless, the conflict between an abstract, removed sense of informing grace and the physical, earthy remnants of a pagan, natural religion fired Drayton's imagination, along with several other writers of the 1590s.

IV. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* shares with Drayton's sophisticated pastoral the uneasy shifting between the world of civilized human authority, with its attendant ritual forms, and the world of unstable natural forms, which both mirror and

²⁰¹ Sukanta Chaudhuri, *Renaissance Pastoral and its English Developments* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 199.

challenge the status quo of the other world. The world his play presents is a great hybrid of forms: classical, native, continental, and obscure. As Leonard Barkan argues, in this play “Shakespeare creates a new mythology that bridges the domestic and the pagan.”

Structurally, by linking the human mythical world (in the figures of Theseus and Hippolyta) with the spiritual mythical world (in the figures of Oberon and Titania), Shakespeare sets up parallels that “may help to resolve disorder in a cosmic plan of correspondences, but they also stand as a disquieting arena of doubleness, a secret or nether side that lurks under the show of harmony, in just the way that ‘deeper’ meanings lurk under the integumentum of pagan fable.”²⁰² The drama continually asserts the sensitive, natural world of the pagan deities as tests for the ordering rituals of Theseus and the court. By accessing a tension that pagan spirituality shared with Christianity, namely the always unstable containment of numinous forces within mutable social rituals, Shakespeare could also pose complicated questions to his own ecclesiastical polity. Indeed, the questions his play asks about religious and social community, the role of the imagination and natural religion, and the place of sensible objects in a ceremonial society are all familiar from Hooker and much of the literature that mined the classical world for its structure and themes.

The critical account of the play that has emerged often deals with the ceremonialist debates within early modern culture alongside the play’s relationship to ritual and ceremony broadly conceived. As one critic summarizes the relationship between ritual and the comic form,

Ritualistic comedy is the belief in and celebration of man’s participation in a recurrent pattern of renewal; it affirms a reality beyond the workaday world which confines identity and confounds desire. To ritualize experience is to replace the sense of everyday living, or living in a given society in immediate time, with a symbol of

²⁰² Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh*, 253–54.

another sense of living, of living in communion with the natural and the divine in suspended or transcendent time.²⁰³

C. L. Barber has also interpreted the continually shifting perspectives of comic form in terms of the ritual dilation of identity beyond the everyday world:

The teeming metamorphoses which we encounter are placed . . . in a medium and in a moment where the perceived structure of the outer world breaks down, where the body and its environment interpenetrate in unaccustomed ways, so that the seeming separateness and stability of identity is lost.²⁰⁴

However, scholars have also pointed out that the play is embedded in the specifics of its immediate social and historical context. David Wiles, among others, has argued that the play was written for the wedding of Elizabeth Carey and Thomas Berkeley in early 1596.²⁰⁵ The festive atmosphere of the play thus anchors it in the social world of Shakespeare's day at the same time that it presents viewers with scenes of ritualistic escape and transcendence. I, too, wish to stress the social significance of the rituals and ceremonies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but with a difference. Wiles believes that "The seasonal/festive discourse which Shakespeare exploited was under attack from puritanism, certainly, but it gained a new vitality by virtue of being under threat."²⁰⁶ However, we cannot assume that this discourse was itself whole and fully formed as Shakespeare conceived it; Shakespeare the playwright was not a polemicist for ceremony, though he was interested in asking the questions about religious ritual that would have intrigued and tested his audience. In fact, the ritual world in

²⁰³ James E. Robinson, "The Ritual and Rhetoric of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *PMLA* 83 (1968): 380.

²⁰⁴ Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 135.

²⁰⁵ See Wiles, *Shakespeare's Almanac: "A Midsummer Night's Dream," Marriage and the Elizabethan Calendar* (Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 1993); and Paul A. Olson, "A *Midsummer Night's Dream* and the Meaning of Court Marriage," *ELH* 24 (1957): 95–119.

²⁰⁶ Wiles, *Shakespeare's Almanac*, 98.

the play is highly unstable; the numinous, natural forces of its pagan setting consistently disrupt the traditional rituals and social arrangements of its human inhabitants. The religious institutions of the play are themselves relatively new, as Theseus, at least in Plutarch's account of his life, had been a great innovator. But just as Hooker's mutable church could introduce new forms as needed, so Theseus's rituals change and adapt to the transformations that fill the play.

The spirits, especially Oberon and Titania, are representatives of the forces of change that continually buffet human society from within and without. When we first hear about Oberon's interest in the human world, it is in the form of his indulgence in literary tastes shared by many Englishmen of the 1590s. In act 2 Titania criticizes Oberon for playing the shepherd and composing love lyrics of the pastoral variety:

but I know
When thou hast stol'n away from fairyland
And in the shape of Corin sat all day,
Playing on pipes of corn, and versing love
To amorous Phillida.²⁰⁷

The image is meant to be insultingly ridiculous, because Oberon is the king of the fairies; his control over the natural world is vast and the idea that he would want to use a corn pipe to compose poetry is absurd. And as is soon made clear, Oberon has the power to completely control the objects of human affection. Why does Oberon do it, then? Part of the reason is that Oberon is an unrepentant shape-shifter; his metamorphoses, and those of the other fairies, are representative both of the mutability of the natural world and of the informing spirit power of nature to affect the world of human society. But it is also apparent that pastoral poetry, like Shakespeare's play, often takes as its subject the relationship between a

²⁰⁷ Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Peter Holland (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 2.1.64–68. All citations of the play are from this edition and will appear in the text by act, scene, and line.

pretend world of immediate natural virtue and a serious world through which it is refracted. For pastoral poets of the 1590s, as we have seen, were determined to teach their readers a kind of performative virtue that at once respected decorum of devotion and rejected its more egregious manifestations. Oberon's masquerade as a shepherd only emphasizes the strange relationship between the pastoral and the real worlds: he escapes from fairy land, a pretend world, into the real world of the shepherds that is itself a pretend world for human society. David Ormerod rightly has suggested that we must read the play as a "dual-locale comedy," oscillating between court and wood.²⁰⁸ However, the "locales" of the play are not just the physical settings but also the permeable genres and stories that Shakespeare mixes throughout. The hall-of-mirrors of generic abstraction emphasizes the interconnectedness of both worlds and the mutual benefit or harm they can cause each other. As Shakespeare suggests, even the wild, numinous spirits yearn for decorum and degree, while the socially stratified and hierarchical society of Athens yearns for dissolution and transcendence. To respect both, without yielding too much to either, is the always distant goal.

Oberon's time spent as a shepherd thus helps us to understand a fundamental tension throughout the play. T. Walter Herbert has argued that representations of nature in the play vacillate between "animist" and "naturalist" perspectives.²⁰⁹ On the one hand, nature often appears to be animated by powerful, shape-shifting spirits that act almost like passionate beings themselves. On the other, nature can also seem like a mechanism divorced from feeling and impelled by irresistible and unchanging cosmic forces. Shakespeare mediates between the lovers' passions and the skeptical distrust that arises from the mechanical view

²⁰⁸ Ormerod, "A *Midsummer Night's Dream*: The Monster in the Labyrinth," *Shakespeare Studies* 11 (1978): 39.

²⁰⁹ See Herbert, *Oberon's Mazéd World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), chaps. 5–6.

of nature. He was certainly aware of the context of the guiding myth of Pyramus and Thisbe in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which sets up this same opposition between religious ritual conceived as passionate transcendence and ritual conceived as social enormity. In the *Metamorphoses*, the story of Pyramus and Thisbe is told by one of the Minyads, daughters of Minyas who remain inside during a Bacchic festival. As Ovid writes,

festum celebrare sacerdos
 immunesque operum famulas dominasque suorum
 pectora pelle tegi, crinales solvere vittas,
 serta coma, manibus frondentis sumere thyrsos
 iusserat.²¹⁰

[The Priest had bidden holiday, and that as well the Maide
 As Mistresse (for the time aside all other business layde)
 In Buckskin cotes, with tresses loose, and garlondes on their heare
 Should in their hands the leavie speares (surnamed Thyrsis) beare.]²¹¹

The festival is of course a fertility ritual, with women excused from their work to let down their hair and carry phallic rods through the town. The daughters of Minyas are dubious: while outside there is “clamor iuvenalis et una / femineae voces inpulsaque tympana palmis” (180) (the noyse / of gagling womens tatling tongues and showting out of boyes) (87), inside “solae Minyeides intus / intempestiva turbantes festa Minerva” (180) (Alonly Mineus daughters bent of wilfulnesse, with working / Quite out of time to breake the feast, are in their houses lurking) (87). In Ovid's account, one of the daughters says that instead of attending to the “commentaque sacra” (180) (false rituals) of Bacchus, they should instead tell stories to pass the time. The Minyads' skepticism of Bacchus's power extends to the

²¹⁰ Ovid, *Metamorphoses, Books I–VIII*, ed. and trans. Frank Justus Miller, rev. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 178. Further references will appear in the text

²¹¹ The translation is Arthur Golding's, in *Ovid's "Metamorphoses," the Arthur Golding Translation 1567*, ed. John Frederick Nims (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2000), 86; Further references will appear in the text.

rituals that the people practice in his name; in their opinion, the rituals are distracting and pointless.

The Minyads respond to rituals as a kind of temporary disturbance of their normal lives; the stories they tell are designed to warn against passionate transport. But they are eventually integrated into the ritual themselves, as the power of Bacchus reaches them and they are turned into birds as a punishment. The Minyads' skepticism has its place in the play, though, as an example of the rational response to ritual. They represent, for both Ovid and Shakespeare, the unease that the upper classes felt about ceremonies. They feared, especially in Shakespeare's time, that enthusiastic ceremonies would lead to social unrest and disorder. Philip Stubbes expresses this anxiety in his *Anatomie of Abuses*, often framing it in terms of rituals celebrated for the pagan gods. His account of "Church-ales" is typical of his preoccupations:

The manner of them is thus, In certaine Townes where drunken *Bachus* beares all the sway, against a *Christmas*, an *Easter*, *Whitsonday*, or some other time, the Church-wardens (for so they call them) of euery parish, with the consent of the whole Parish, prouide half a score or twenty quarters of mault, wherof some they buy of the Church-stock, and some is giuen them of the Parishioners them selues, euery one conferring somewhat, according to his abilitie, which mault béeing made into very strongale or béere, it is set to sale, either in the Church or some other place assigned to that purpose.

Then when the *Nippitatum*, this Huf-cap (as they call it) and this *Nectar* of lyfe, is set abroche, wel is he that can get the soonest to it, and spend the most at it, for he that sitteth the closest to it, and spends the moste at it, he is counted the godliest man of all the rest, but who, either cannot for pinching pouertie, or otherwise wil not stick to it, he is counted one destitute bothe of vertue and godlynes. In so much, as you shall haue many poormen make hard shift for money to spend therat, for it, béeing put into this *Corban*, they are perswaded it is meritorious & a good seruice to God. In this kinde of practise, they continue six wéeke, a quarter of a yéer, yea half a yéer together, swilling and gulling, night and day, till they be as drunke as Apes, and as blockish as beasts.²¹²

²¹² Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses* (London, 1583), sigs. M4v–M5r; further references will appear in the text.

For Stubbes, this kind of celebration is a form of social trickery. The clever wardens fool the poor into spending money that ostensibly goes to the church, but actually goes to adorn the “mansion places” of the priests (sig. M6v). Stubbes’s dialogic representative Philoponus echoes the Minyad’s distrust of festivals that draw people away from their work. He rejects what would come to be Hooker’s defense of sacred time when he inveighs against celebrations held for wakes: “But why at one determinat day, more than at another (except busines vrged it) why should one and ye same day continue for euer, or be distinct from other dayes, by the name of a wake day?” (sig. [M7v]). More importantly, he argues that these ritual celebrations lead to social disorder and unrest:

I thinke it conuenient for one Fréend to visite another (at sometimes) as oportunitie & occasion shall offer it selfe, but wherfore shuld the whole towne, parish, village and cuntrey, kéepe one and the same day, and make such gluttonous feasts as they doo? And therfore, to conclude, they are to no end, except it be to draw a great frequencie of whores, drabbes, theiues and verlets together, to maintaine whordome, bawdrie, gluttony, drunkennesse, thieft, murther, swearing and all kind of mischief and abhominacion. For, these be the ends wherto these feastes, and wakesses doo tende. (sig. [M8r])

“Philoponus” means “lover of work,” and it comes as no surprise that he links rustic, quasi-religious rituals with an abandonment of duty by the populace and a misappropriation of funds by the clergy. Ronald Hutton attributes this anxiety to “the growth in poverty and social polarization consequent upon population and monetary inflation in the sixteenth century.” These forces “created a much more general and constant fear of famine and social unrest among the local élites of late Elizabethan England and a much greater propensity to regulate the behaviour of the populace and to reduce the opportunities for unruly crowd activity and sexual encounters which might result in bastard or pauper children for whom the

parish would have to pay.”²¹³ The Ovidian context of the myth structuring Shakespeare’s play thus highlights the underlying cultural and social tensions that attended on festive activity and were enlivened by skeptical critiques of its practical worth. Shakespeare, writing for an aristocratic audience, had these thoughts and tensions in the forefront of his mind, and they show up in the ambivalent responses to the fantastic events of the forest and in the uneasy ritual and theatrical reintegration of Athenian life in the last acts.

The interpretive pull between “animist” and “naturalist” interpretations of religious ritual clearly informs both the action of the play and the social context. Many would ask, along with Shakespeare, if it were possible to have decorous religious culture that respects ceremonies and their attendant sensory delights without taking the sensible objects too seriously, on their own terms. Was it possible to have an animistic concept of ceremonial transcendence while at the same time acknowledging the natural, regular cycles to which humans attached arbitrary significance? The hermeneutic quandary shows up throughout the play, especially when the spirit realm interacts with and affects the human realm. The fight between Oberon and Titania has certainly affected the balance of nature, and yet the spirits themselves use natural drugs that seem to act indiscriminately on the lovers’ bodies. Additionally, Athenian society relies on the lunar calendar to structure its social and religious rituals; however, the timeline and chronological setting of the play are undeniably confused.²¹⁴ It often seems that some parts of nature can act against others that have no agency. As Titania says, the winds, “as in revenge” have brought in contagious fogs (2.1.89), while the “green corn / Hath rotted” (2.1.94–95). In this play of shifting metaphors, the animism of nature sometimes appears to mirror the unruly passions of the humans lovers.

²¹³ Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, 146.

²¹⁴ For the confused timeline, see Laroque, *Shakespeare’s Festive World*, 228–30.

Sometimes it seems as if the orderly cosmos exists as a mere surface ornament to the deeper forces of animated nature; and sometimes the opposite seems to hold true, that the mutable spirits exist on top of a deeper structure of unchanging natural order.

This account of the shifting senses of nature in the play is familiar, but important, as the intentionally fragile natural world of the play foregrounds the efforts of the humans to find a reliable basis for the rituals by which their society functions. The play has been read, persuasively, as an attempt to locate the forces of individual identity within the de-individualizing powers of nature and custom, and thus to suggest that rituals based on natural forms could adapt to the unique, and yet recurrent, cycles of procreation.²¹⁵ Shakespeare, however, never allows the natural world to remain still; the humans are always seeking to understand the significance of the shifting forms they see and sense. Helena remembers when she and Hermia “like two artificial gods / Have with our needles created both one flower, / Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion” (3.2.203–5). The two friends used to have the power to reduce wild nature to a pattern, to bring it into intelligible being through art. But this process is of course disrupted by the confusion of the forest, which threatens to “rend our ancient love asunder” (3.2.125). The questions that the play asks would have been familiar, and troubling, to Richard Hooker, because they are similar to the ones that troubled him the most in his own work. To somehow unite the visible objects of devotion within a mystical framework of transcendence required the imagination to refine the matter of devotion into intelligible forms that could then function as shorthand for the reintegration of the divided, fallen natural world by God himself.²¹⁶ It should, as Helena says of love, “transpose” things

²¹⁵ See Maurice Hunt, “Individuation in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*,” *South Central Review* 3, no. 2 (1986): 10–11.

“base and vile” “to form and dignity” (1.1.232–33). Shakespeare’s play takes this fragile process and continually questions its power and reveals its debility. Crucially, the world of the play exists apart from the Christian God; it is full of undirected natural processes that nonetheless form the rationale for the ways in which the human community orders its collective life and views its customs and traditions.

And it is precisely the pagan setting that lets Shakespeare play so effectively with the nature of social and religious institutions throughout. Indeed, religious institutions are measured by their efficacy in controlling both unruly human passions and unruly natural processes. The experience of the lovers in the forest, and their eventual return, recalls the origin of pastoral poetry in the exile and return of the Greeks, when new forms of worship were added to the religious life of the entire people. In fact, the most intriguing intersection between pagan and Christian components in the play might lie in its insistence on the mutability of “forms” and their relevance and importance for the construction of a meaningful religious polity.

In one of his first speeches, Theseus sets up the relationship between divine power and the bestowal of forms on the world of human figures. Egeus comes to Theseus to complain that his daughter Hermia wishes to marry Lysander instead of Demetrius, the man Egeus had selected for her. When Hermia confirms this, Theseus replies:

What say you, Hermia? Be advised, fair maid.
To you your father should be as a god,
One that composed your beauties, yea, and one
To whom you are but as a form in wax,

²¹⁶ For further discussion of the role of imagination in the play, see R. W. Dent, “Imagination in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15 (1964): 115–29; reprinted in *“A Midsummer Night’s Dream”: Critical Essays*, ed. Dorothea Kehler (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 85–106. See also David P. Young, *Something of Great Constancy: The Art of “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,”* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 126–41; and, for a more general discussion of imagination, William Rossky, “Imagination in the English Renaissance: Psychology and Poetic,” *Studies in the Renaissance* 5 (1958): 49–73.

By him imprinted, and within his power
To leave the figure or disfigure it.

(1.1.46–50)

Theseus's notion of the father as the sole giver of forms is seriously questioned by the rest of the action, however. The idea that wax, like children, takes the shapes it is given is certainly proverbial, but it also clearly echoes Aristotle's discussion of the senses in his *De Anima*. In fact, Theseus unwittingly undermines the argument he is trying to make by introducing a destabilizing metaphor, one fraught with philosophical accretions whose importance becomes clear as the play progresses.

In the first place, the idea that Hermia is a "form in wax" only serves to remind us that wax is thoroughly mutable and takes any shape impressed upon it. Theseus imagines Egeus as a giver of a singular form that he can impress upon matter, but matter proves to be more receptive to different forms than such a unidirectional model might imply. Indeed, the conflict has arisen because Hermia has proven able to diverge from the "form" that her father has given her. Her senses have been affected by Lysander, not Demetrius. Egeus claims that Lysander has "stol'n the impression of her fantasy" (1.1.32); but, as Hermia pleads, "I would my father looked but with my eyes" (1.1.56). According to Aristotle, it is the definition of a "sense" that it "has the power of receiving into itself the sensible forms of things without the matter, in the way in which a piece of wax takes the impress of a signet-ring without the iron or gold" (674). In other words, the wax of the physical organ is impressed by the form of the ring but does not take on its matter. This allows for the mutability that is troubling the Athenian court. As Theseus says, Egeus has the power to "disfigure" Hermia, but he is certainly not the only one. The characters' imaginations are all easily fooled and changed by sensory input. As Hooker had argued when citing Aristotle's work on the soul, the

imagination was a crucial force for applying forms to material objects and thus linking the objects of devotion to their higher religious purposes. So too, Theseus hopes that Hermia's father will be a "god" to her and that her imagination will fall into line with his. But the inherent mutability of the forms that matter can take on destabilizes both Hooker's and Theseus's visions of a religio-political community based on conjoining numinous forces with human rituals such as marriage, which depends on a congruity between the set forms of tradition and the changing forms in the wax of later generations.

Theseus's political and religious community was especially vulnerable to destabilization because his reign ushered in new rituals and forms of religious and political life. Shakespeare's source for the details of Theseus's life, Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives* (via the French of Jacques Amyot), paints Theseus as an innovator, someone who completely reformed Athenian life. His exploits provided the basis for many rituals and ceremonies that were contemporary with Plutarch, who gives a remarkably full account of the rituals practiced by Theseus's Athenians. In Shakespeare's play, too, every time Theseus appears he obsesses about the upcoming nuptial ceremonies. In act 1 he tells Philostrate,

Stir up the Athenian youth to merriments.
Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth.
Turn melancholy forth to funerals—
The pale companion is not for our pomp.

(1.1.12–15)

He tells Hippolyta that though he courted her in battle, he will wed her "in another key— / With pomp, with triumph, and with revelling" (1.1.18–19). The next time we see him, in act 4, he meets the lovers in the woods and thinks, "No doubt they rose up early to observe / The rite of May, and, hearing our intent, / Came here in grace of our solemnity" (4.1.131–33). He decides that all the couples will be married "in the temple," and he will afterwards "hold a

feast in great solemnity” (4.1.179, 184). Later, back in Athens, he wonders “what masques, what dances shall we have . . . what revels are in hand?” (5.1.32, 36). His parting words promise that “A fortnight hold we this solemnity / In nightly revels and new jollity” (5.1.360–61). Theseus remains focused on the function of ceremonies and rituals for his commonwealth through all the changes and transformations of affections.

Plutarch’s Theseus similarly busies himself in establishing rituals and customs that were indicative of his unifying and transforming effect on the Athenian state. Theseus famously rescued Athenian children who had been sent to Crete to be sacrificed to the Minotaur; upon his arrival back in Athens, his father Aegeus kills himself when Theseus forgets to raise the white sail that would indicate his survival. Plutarch recounts a story that could well serve as an epigraph for Shakespeare’s play:

The vessell in which *Theseus* went and returned, was a galliot of thirtie owers, which the ATHENIANS kept vntill the time of *Demetrius* the *Phalertan*, alwayes taking away the olde peeces of wodde that were rotten, and euer renewing them with new in their places. So that euer since, in the disputations of the Philosophers, touching things that increase, to wit, whether they remaine alwayes one, or else they be made others: this galliot was alwayes brought in for an example of doubt.²¹⁷

The rule of Theseus in Athens functioned much like the Athenians’ care of his ship. Theseus took the native piety and rituals of the Athenians and formed them to his own idea of what his Athens should look like. The changes in form and even matter that occur in Shakespeare’s play have a similar function. Their transformations all take place within the ritual framework represented by the court of Theseus and Athenian society. The changing yet stable ship could also be an emblem for Hooker’s church, rooted in the forms of the past but updating them with new matter and forms that are approximations of the old forms.

²¹⁷ Plutarch, “Life of Theseus,” in *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes*, trans. Thomas North (London, 1579), 12. Further references will appear in the text.

Theseus's innovations in Athenian society thus strive to maintain a continuity with the past even while remaking it. Plutarch's accounts of Theseus founding ceremonies follow this pattern. When he arrives on shore from Crete, Theseus performs sacrifices, and a herald is dispatched to inform him of his father's death. The herald wraps the garland intended for Theseus around his staff instead of placing it on his head. Because of this, writes Plutarch, "to this day, at the feast called Oscophoria (as who would say at the feast of boughes) the Herauld hath not his heade but his rod onely crowned with flowers" (11). In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Theseus similarly changes funereal melancholy into a celebration of a more positive event. As he tells Philostrate, "Turn melancholy forth to funerals— / The pale companion is not for our pomp" (1.1.14–15). Flowers have a special significance for Theseus, as the founder of a festival that was celebrated in Athens annually. Flowers also cause problems for the lovers, when the faeries use flowers and herbs to create the drugs that bewitch their vision. However they are used, though, they remain apt symbols of the relation between cycles of natural change—Pliny called them reminders of ephemerality—and the ritual celebrations of change in human society. Plutarch's account portrays Theseus as particularly good at instituting rituals: everywhere he goes and everything he does seems to become the setting and subject of an enduring ceremony. This blend of piety, discipline, and social conscience was the reason, Plutarch's narrative implies, for Theseus's success.

The most important dimension of Theseus's religious reforms is that they were inclusive and rectifying. He also set up a temple, "and he him selfe ordained, that those houses which had payed tribute before unto the king of CRETA, should nowe yearly thenceforth become contributories towards the charges and of a solemne sacrifice, which shoulde be done in the honor of him" (12). Theseus's strategy in setting up new ceremonies

is to maintain a sense of social justice in the minds of the people. Francis Bacon remarked that Theseus illustrated the principle that is “almost generall in all states, that their law-givers were long after their first Kings, who governed for a time by natural equity without law; So was Theseus long before Solon in Athens.”²¹⁸ And it is in this spirit of “natural equity” that Theseus sets up the participatory religious and civic life that turned Athens into a commonwealth. Much like the later reunification of the country after the Persian War, Theseus “brought all the inhabitantes of the whole prouince of ATTICA, to be within the citie of ATHENS, and made them all one corporation, which were before dispersed into diuerse villages, and by reason thereof were very hard to be assembled together, when occasion was offered to establish any order concerning the common state” (12). He followed this unification of the people with new ceremonies and rituals that he hoped would concretize Athenian identity in mutually inclusive rituals:

Afterwardes he instituted the greate feast and common sacrifice for all of the countrey of ATTICA, which they call *Panathenea*. Then he ordeined another feaste also vpon the sixteenth daye of the moneth of Iune, for all strangers which should come to dwell in ATHENS, which was called *Metaecia*, & is kept euen to this daye. That done, he gaue ouer his regall power according to his promise, and beganne to sett vp an estate or policie of a common wealth, beginning first with the seruice of the goddes. (13)

He appointed “noblemen as judges & magistrates to judge upon matters of Religion, & touching the service of the godds” (13). Theseus replaces the old institutions of justice and religious observance with his own versions and staffs them with his newly formed citizenry. The authority governing his Athens is, then, more religious and communal than authoritarian, though of course Theseus retains ultimate control over the polity. But he shrewdly realized

²¹⁸ Bacon, *Three Speeches of the Right Honorable, Sir Francis Bacon Knight, then his Majesties Sollicitor Generall, after Lord Verulam, Viscount Saint Alban, concerning the Post-Nati, Naturalization of the Scotch in England, Union of the Lawes of the Kingdomes of England and Scotland* (London, 1641), 9.

that for such a community to function, it would have to rely on the oaths, vows, and allegiances between the citizens themselves.

Theseus's faith in oaths as the binding that holds together his city becomes clear after he defeats the Amazons and brings Hippolyta back to Athens as his wife. Even though historians disagree about the events of the war with the Amazons, Plutarch writes, "it is most certain that this warre was ended by agreement. For a place adjoining to the temple of Theseus, dothe beare recorde of it, being called *Orcomosium*: because the peace was there by solemne othe concluded" (15). "Solemn," as we have seen, was a staple of Theseus's and Hippolyta's dialogue. One of her first lines declares that "the moon, like to a silver bow / New bent in heaven, shall behold the night / Of our solemnities" (1.1.9–11). Just as Hooker assured his readers that no society has ever functioned without public actions being accompanied by some sort of "visible solemnitie" (1:274), so Athens' leaders also are especially obsessed by their public and private "solemnities" throughout. The word connotes a very specific set of meanings having to do with religious rituals. It means not only ceremonies and festivities, but ceremonies that have a serious religious purpose and that are observed carefully. It also connotes, especially when used in its Latinate sense, of something that is done yearly or at least regularly. The solemnities of the play, then, have the dual function of sanctifying a special occasion and linking that occasion to the larger traditions and customs of the community. It is this sense of custom inherent in the "solemne othe" that Theseus swears in Plutarch's account that is most important to him in his role as unifier of Athens. Theseus clearly has faith in oaths to preserve the city and further unite it with its enemies through his own marriage.

Plutarch's Theseus brings peace to Athens through oaths, and yet oaths trouble the confused lovers in the forest and thus trouble the basis of Athenian religion and political society. Oaths serve a double function for Athens. They are natural and social, pointing toward the relationships of people in society, who make agreements by law and expect them to be honored. But they are also religious and metaphysical, pointing toward the numinous foundations of social relationships and the otherworldly bond that they create out of seemingly breakable human promises. Oaths, of course, held a pervasive significance for the early modern mind; as the historian John Spurr observed of oaths in the seventeenth century, "Oaths bind lovers, just as they adjudicate between litigants. They are constitutive of communes, gilds, fraternities, professions and institutions. They are at the heart of convenanting communities and bonds of association."²¹⁹ The spirit world tests the tensile strength of the humans' oaths through visions and drugs, thus also testing the political stability of Theseus's religious commonwealth.

Oaths and vows are consistently introduced into the dialogue only to be undermined at every turn. Theseus gives Hermia a choice either to marry Demetrius "or to abjure / For ever the society of men" (1.1.65–66) and consign herself "To death or to a vow of single life" (1.1.121). The four young lovers, however, are certainly conscious of how easily love's vows and oaths are made, then broken as quickly. Hermia even swears "By all the vows that ever men have broke" (1.1.175) that she will meet him in the forest. Helena, spurned by Demetrius, is a victim of oath breaking. Her speech at the end of the first scene traces the cause of such mutable love oaths to the way that love muddies the relationship between vision and the mind. Shakespeare plays with "eyes" and "sight" throughout the first scene,

²¹⁹ Spurr, "A Profane History of Early Modern Oaths, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., 11 (2001): 47.

and it becomes clear by the end that the “oaths” sworn by lovers are subject both to the mutable sense of sight and to the imagination that sometimes overrules the sense. Helena says,

As waggish boys in game themselves forswear,
So the boy Love is perjured everywhere.
For ere Demetrius looked on Hermia’s eyne
He hailed down oaths that he was only mine,
And when this hail some heat from Hermia felt,
So he dissolved, and showers of oaths did melt.
(1.1.240–45)

The multiplying oaths of the lovers stand in contrast to the solemn oaths that Theseus believes cement political authority and social stability. And indeed, Shakespeare links the lovers’ oaths to the mutability of the imagination itself, the very thing that Hooker thought would help place sensible objects into a ceremonial, and eventually transcendent, framework. Helena wants love to look “not with the eyes, but with the mind” (1.1.234), but, as she observes, the eyes often do not perfectly accord with the mind. The instability of the imagination in Athens is also linked to the transformative power of the natural world itself, in which sensible objects are subject to transformation.

If the basis of Theseus’s religious commonwealth is communally recognized rituals and ceremonies, and the binding power of oaths, then it is severely shaken by the events in the forest. Oberon has proven himself an inconstant lover in his masquerade as the shepherd “Corin” wooing Philida. Of course, his love oaths cannot be kept, and his infidelity to Titania inaugurates the liquidation of vows in the forest. In the midst of Robin Goodfellow’s mischief, he proclaims that “fate o’errules, that, one man holding troth, / A million fail, confounding oath on oath” (3.2.92–93). About to watch the confusion unfold between Helena and Lysander, Robin invites Oberon to watch “their fond pageant “(3.2.114). The

confounding of oaths itself has a kind of ritualistic quality for Robin and Oberon: “Lord, what fools these mortals be!” (3.2.115). The mortals are, in Robin’s mind, fools of fate, a force that does not respect the mutable affections and passions of mortals. Lysander, though, believes that his emotions seal his vows. He says, “Look when I vow, I weep; and vows so born, / In their nativity all truth appears” (3.2.123–24). For the clear-thinking Helena, though, oath breaking is nonsensical because it asks truth to compete with truth:

You do advance your cunning more and more,
When truth kills truth—O devilish holy fray!
These vows are Hermia’s. Will you give her o’er?
Weigh oath with oath, and you will nothing weigh.
Your vows to her and me put in two scales
Will even weigh, and both as light as tales.

(3.2.128–33)

What is the basis of Lysander’s oaths? It is, as Helena suggested in act 1, the sensory input from his eyes rather than his mind. But her lament suggests a fundamental problem with the function of the senses to convey the “truth” into the imagination, where it can feed the mind. Lysander responds by saying that “I had no judgement when to her I swore” (3.2.134). He mistakes his rational faculties for his sensory and imaginative faculties. Previously, though, Hermia had commiserated with Lysander over the fact that her father wanted her “to choose love by another’s eyes” (1.1.140). Lysander, now under the spell of Oberon’s flower, chooses love by another’s eyes and totally confounds his previous oath on the basis of his present choice. As he told Hermia then, and which proves prophetic in act 3,

Or if there were a sympathy in choice,
War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it,
Making it momentany as a sound
Swift as a shadow, short as any dream.

(1.1.141–43)

The ephemeral quality of the lovers' oaths stands in contrast to the eternally binding power of the "vow of single life" with which Theseus threatened her, and thus in contrast to Theseus's faith in oaths that last a lifetime.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Theseus has trouble believing the visions that the lovers report to him and Hippolyta after their night in the woods. The shifting allegiances and the strange visions they recount test the boundaries of his society. Theseus certainly has some conception of the role of the imagination in a religio-political community. After all, the rituals he is so fond of play to the imagination with their outward, visible pomp and ceremony. But Theseus tries to distinguish between two types of imagination in his conversation with Hippolyta in act 5. On the one hand, there is the faculty that "apprehends," that senses the forms and shapes of one's immediate surroundings. Apprehension is also the emotive faculty, one that seizes on whatever is closest at hand. Then again, there is the faculty that "comprehends," which imagines the source of the immaterial forms and shapes that the other faculty presents. And yet, Theseus's critiques of the excesses of the imagination come just before his own imaginative festivals take place. As he complains to Hippolyta:

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact.
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold:
That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
The poet's eye, in 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.

Such tricks hath strong imagination
That if it would but apprehend some joy
It comprehends some bringer of that joy;
Or in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is a bush supposed a bear!

(5.1.4–22)

Theseus's skepticism bears strong resemblance to the anti-ritual writers and even to Ovid's Minyads. But his conception of the "poet's eye" sounds much like the operation of religious rituals that mediate the commerce between heaven and earth.²²⁰ While the "poet's pen" takes abstract forms and supplies them with shapes and names in the manner of a neo-platonic demiurge, proper "solemnities" would take observed experience and endow it with new "forms of things unknown." Theseus also criticizes the imagination for presuming to deduce a cause from an effect; this impulse, he implies, is what makes people create gods from their own emotions. More troubling than this, though, is his implication that the imagination produces "fear," which in turn creates phantasms and thus leads to superstition.

The terms of Theseus's critique are familiar from Cecropia's critique of superstitious religion in the versions of Sidney's *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* that were published in the early 1590s. In book 3, Cecropia tries to convince Pamela that religion was invented by "politicke wittes." She continues:

Feare, and indeede, foolish feare, & fearefull ignorance, was the first inuenter of those conceates. For, when they hearde it thunder, not knowing the naturall cause, they thought there was some angrie body aboue, that spake so lowde: and euer the lesse they did perceiue, the more they did conceiue. Whereof they knew no cause that grew streight a miracle: foolish folkes, not marking that the alterations be but vpon particular accidents, the vniuersalitie being alwaies one. Yesterday was but as to day, and to morrow will tread the same footsteps of his foregoers: so as it is manifest inough, that all thinges follow but the course of their owne nature, sauimg onely Man, who

²²⁰ For a discussion of the "various sly ironies" of Theseus's speech, see Graham Bradshaw, *Shakespeare's Scepticism* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1987), 43–44.

while by the pregnancie of his imagination he striues to things
supernaturall, meane-while hee looseth his owne naturall felicitie.²²¹

This inability to distinguish the true cause of natural effects is much the same as the inability to distinguish between real and false shapes that Theseus dislikes. Theseus, too, advocates a kind of natural theology that would clarify the apprehension of “joy” in the comprehension of some natural cause. The “imagination,” for both Theseus and Cecropia, blinds people to the real causes of both positive and negative mental states.

Of course, this position was hardly tenable in Shakespeare’s play, just as it was not in Sidney’s romance. In the forest it is not “fear” but Oberon’s magic flowers that make even spirits mistake one thing for another. Theseus laughed at mistaking a bush for a bear, but as Oberon describes the effects of his drug on Titania:

Having once this juice
I’ll watch Titania when she is asleep,
And drop the liquor of it in her eyes.
The next thing when she waking looks upon—
Be it on lion, bear, or wolf, or bull,
On meddling monkey, or on busy ape—
She shall pursue it with the soul of love.
(2.1.176–82)

Theseus, if we accept that he defeated an actual minotaur—not just one of Minos’s guards, as Plutarch presents as a possibility—would have known the capacity for natural shapes to transform and mix. As the events of the forest suggest, the cause of the fanciful effects that Theseus hears about is actually the power inherent in natural objects that have been endowed with special power by the nature gods of pagan myth. The origin of Oberon’s flower, it will be remembered, lies in Cupid’s attempt at a “fair vestal thronèd by the west” (2.1.158). But his arrow misses, “And the imperial vot’ress passèd on, / In maiden meditation, fancy-free” (2.1.163–64). The “vestal” is, of course, not a candidate for marriage and thus foreign to the

²²¹ Sidney, *The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia* (London, 1593), fol. 137v–38r.

festivities that Athens is preparing throughout the play. Further, the “vot’ress” remains “fancy-free,” exempt from the vagaries of the imagination (from the Greek “φαντασία”) that all lovers experience. The imaginative flights that Theseus decries are in fact necessary corollaries to his taste for ritual celebrations and “solemnities.” The process of imaginative trickery that Theseus describes is the reverse of Hooker’s “imagination,” which would take things with a “local habitation” and abstract them from their immediate context in order to create a kind of communal religious experience.

And indeed it is the communal dimension of the fairy tales that Hippolyta seizes on in her response to Theseus. She replies,

But all the story of the night told over,
And all their minds transfigured so together,
More witnesseth than fancy’s images,
And grows to something of great constancy;
But howsoever, strange and admirable.

(5.1.23–27)

Her argument is that the communal dimension of this shared imaginative transport at least partially negates the solipsistic, overly individualistic bent of Theseus’s concept of the imagination. The shared experience of the images, rather than the truth value of the images themselves, seems to Hippolyta the most important dimension of the events in the forest. This shared experience by which several people are united by “fancy’s images” is essentially the basis for the religious and social rituals that Theseus so loves. And the essential nature of those images hardly matters; the point is that they become totemic forms around which unite the collective activities of human minds bent on seeking meaning beyond those imaginative forms. In his speech, however, Theseus comes dangerously close to the “politick wittes” that Cecropia described in Sidney’s *Arcadia*. That is, he seems to deny the function of imagination to place the objects of sense into a framework of religious transcendence.

Hippolyta's critique also touches on Theseus's past as an unfaithful lover. We are probably supposed to contrast her phrase "something of great constancy" with Theseus's long history of being an inconstant lover. As Plutarch writes in his comparison of Theseus with Romulus, Theseus was constantly stealing women (and then losing interest in them): he "dyd attempt it very often" (43). Furthermore, his marriages did not bring peace to his city: "The ATHENIANS contrariwise, by *Theseus* mariages, dyd get neither loue nor kynred of any one persone, but rather they procured warres, enmities, & the slaughter of their citizens" (ibid.). The key point that Plutarch makes is that Theseus lacked consistency, especially when it came to his own relationships, and that that inconsistency led to bad governance. However, it is one of these relationships that Theseus is solemnizing in the course of this comic play. It stands at the moment of the play as an emblem for concord and a suggestion of the power of ritual to concretize national consciousness, but it was also a reminder of the ill-fated product of their union, whom Theseus would later murder.²²² The fundamental contradiction in Theseus's conception of rituals lies in his attempt to rationalize and then memorialize his sexual exploits in ceremonies that always have something irrational and fantastic about them. His civic, state religion relies on strict aristocratic control over the mechanisms of religious observance. (As Plutarch reminds us, he left the nobility in charge of maintaining religious rites.) However, Shakespeare sets his play in a moment before his downfall, and arguably at his highest point as leader of Athens. Hippolyta's criticism is perhaps aimed at preventing him from becoming a tyrant that cannot empathize with the collective fantasies of his people. Shakespeare can use the neat conjunction between the two state religions, that of Athens and that of England, to suggest that such a state religion must

²²² For the darker undertones that the complexities of the Theseus myth introduce, see M. E. Lamb, "A *Midsummer-Night's Dream*: The Myth of Theseus and the Minotaur," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 21 (1979): 478–91.

acknowledge the power of the imaginations of its citizens. Thus, the act of bestowing “a local habitation and a name” on the forms that the imagination produces comes to seem as potentially normative and unifying for a religious state that respects ceremony but nonetheless remains skeptical of ritual transport and transformation.

The basis of the experience of ritual transport, though, remains the senses, whose relationship with the imagination is consistently troubled by events in both Shakespeare’s play and the play put on by Quince and his company. The company is composed of artisans, and as such they appear to be comfortable discussing the physical changes that accompany theatrical productions. As a social class, they have a special status as ill-defined outsiders both in Theseus’s Athens and Shakespeare’s England. Plutarch wrote that Theseus divided up the city into nobility, husbandmen, and artisans, with the husbandmen being the wealthier but the artisans the more numerous. In England, artisans represented an emerging class that sometimes commanded wealth but was hard to pin down outside of the various professions.²²³ The role of Shakespeare’s artisans seems suited to express their ambiguous social position: they are not fully integrated into the social structures in which they participate, but nonetheless their play, at once skeptical and enthusiastic, reflects the strengths and weaknesses of Theseus’s rituals of state religion.

Bottom, in particular, delights in the transformative options the theater allows him. He says of playing Pyramus, “I will discharge it in either your straw-colour beard, your orange-tawny beard, your purple-in-grain beard, or your French-crown-colour beard, your perfect yellow” (1.2.83–86). Later on, the players become anxious that these transformations may fool the audience of the play, and so Bottom devises a prologue, which will, “for the

²²³ See David Cressy, “Describing the Social Order of Elizabethan and Stuart England,” *Literature and History* 3 (1976): 37–38.

more better assurance, tell them that I, Pyramus, am not Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver. This will put them out of fear” (3.1.18–20). Shakespeare’s artisans, like Ovid’s Minyads, are sceptical of the effects of transformation; they are more comfortable with the transformations of wool, as they busy themselves inside, “aut ducunt lanas aut stamina pollice versant / aut haerent telae famulasque laboribus urgent” (180) (And there doe fall to spinning yarne, or weaving in the frame, / And keepe their maidens to their worke) (87). Shakespeare’s artisans are enthusiastic about the possibilities for transformation that theatrical ritual offers, but remain worried about the potential misinterpretations that the transformations may bring about.

In later acts, the status of the senses becomes important, especially for Bottom and the production in Theseus’s court. When Bottom is changed back to himself at the end of act 4, he misquotes scripture by misaligning senses with their organs: “The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man’s hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was” (4.1.206–10). 1 Corinthians 2:9–10 makes the distinction that while the senses are often inadequate to understand divine truth, the spirit is. Bottom seems partially to understand this, while in the next scene Theseus rejects spiritual, imaginative attempts to reconcile fantasy and physical reality. During the performance of “Pyramus and Thisbe,” Bottom continues to confuse the senses. “I see a voice,” he says as Pyramus, “Now will I to the chink / To spy an I can hear my Thisbe’s face” (5.1.191–92). However, at the crucial moment when Pyramus finds Thisbe’s bloody mantle, Bottom gets the senses right:

But mark, poor knight,
What dreadful dole is here?
Eyes, do you see?
How can it be?

The moonlight may be to blame for this sight that is at once true and false; for the moon has been a force of instability and doubt throughout the play. Nonetheless, when Bottom finally attributes the right sense to the right organ it is precisely when his character is being betrayed by his senses. His senses produce the wrong kind of imagination; the physical remains of Thisbe's mantle are extrapolated as signs of her death through an act of imagination.

This ambivalence surrounding the imagination in the production makes sense if we remember that in Ovid's poem this story is told by one of the Minyads in order to criticize the imaginative transports of the Bacchic revelers outside their house. Shakespeare's play seems similarly to share an Ovidian ambivalence about enthusiastic rituals. On the one hand, their celebrations are licit, especially when set up by civic and sacred authorities and remain temporary expressions of the harmony of man and nature. But, their celebrations are often not decorous, and indeed are apt to mislead both their participants and their spectators. This is the compromise represented in Theseus's Athens, which is indicative of the larger response to pagan religious culture in the 1590s. Civilized pagan culture represented for early moderns a culture in which sacred and civic experience were almost always coterminous; and yet both existed within a single social framework.²²⁴ Greek culture did not separate church and state, nor did it make one subservient to the other. However, this coexistence caused obvious problems when one side encroached into the other. But in imagining the potential tensions and pitfalls of maintaining decorous rituals within a society of laws and equity, Shakespeare, along with his contemporaries, could delineate and address the problems that such a maintenance presented in his own time.

²²⁴ See Robert Parker, "What are Sacred Laws?" in *The Law and the Courts in Ancient Greece*, ed. Edward M. Harris and Lene Rubinstein (London: Duckworth, 2004), 57–70.

Taking my cue from Shakespeare's complex evocation of pagan cultures, in my next chapter I expand on the early modern response to the interrelation of sacred and civic in pagan society. I also position literary texts alongside responses to paganism in other strands of early modern culture: colonial encounters, travel, antiquarianism, classical scholarship, and ecclesiastical conflict. The chapter suggests that as pagan forms of thought became more and more interwoven in early modern culture, they began to play increasingly crucial roles in early modern self-definition. This process played was especially important for arguments about the nature and function of sacred spaces and places, a particularly vexing problem for a nation undergoing a crisis of national and religious identity in the 1630s and 40s.

Chapter 4

Locating the Sacred: Pagan Spaces and Places in John Milton's Early Works and Seventeenth-Century Religious Culture

As Richard Hooker argued, and I discussed in the last chapter, all religious rituals are justified by the idea that some times and places must be invested with greater significance than others. The division of time and space, in the human world, forms the corollary of the selective divine investment in the world. Here was a major point of contact between pagan and Christian religious systems, and Hooker was well aware of the extent to which even the modern, English church had inherited forms of worship from non-Christian religions.

Hooker's was not the first (though it was the most articulate) treatise that would spawn many more considerations of religious discipline and its effects on society, politics, and history in the seventeenth century. In fact, as this discourse developed in the 1630s it came more and more to incorporate legal and political debates about the relationship between religious practices and state power. In both the historical sources and contemporary culture of English religious discipline, state regulation of religious space formed a crucial battleground for the fight over the power that the state should exercise over the church itself.

As I argue in this chapter, this discourse looked backward, both to the ancient Israelites' interactions with surrounding polytheistic societies and to the early years of the institutional Christian church and its incorporation into the Roman empire under Constantine. The ways in which the early Christians dealt with competing, and sympathetic, claims for

sacred existence from pagans inform many seventeenth-century arguments over sacred space. At stake in these competing claims was the political and institutional axis of God's action toward his creatures and his creation. Places gave God's will not just a location, but also material, legal, national, political, and ultimately historical dimensions that had to be examined and determined. Indeed, the history of the worship of God in specific places was highly relevant to much religious debate in this period. And this history had to take into account the differing spatial theories of pagans and Christians. On one level, paganism's investment in sacred spaces contrasted obviously and strikingly with Christian practice. To consign a "god" to a particular place was to confuse the operation of Christian ideas of grace and accommodation. But on the other hand, the force of divine accommodation, via natural law or positive laws of worship, could be discerned in the *conversion* of pagan spaces into Christian. Furthermore, the historical transmission and transformation of pagan practices into the institutionalized Christian church proved a contentious arena for debate precisely because such transmissions were apparent, even obvious.

As becomes clear in this period, the tense relationship between pagan and Christian forms mediates arguments over the proper role of institutionalized Christian religion. Looking to the discourse of sacred spaces, both pagan and Christian, thus helps to lay bare the heart of institutional religion and the shape of reform: defenders of established forms focused on correcting external rites, assuming an inward righteousness of intention; reformers positioned corruption as an internal defect, a contagion to be fought. For some, pagan forms were acceptable for the simple fact that they were historically derived and then transmuted by Christian communities under the light of nature. For others, history did not matter so much as the fact that pagan forms represented the propensity of idolatry to lead to

institutional corruption and to a mixture of sacred and profane. Thus, a de-institutionalized poetics would look for ways to conceive of pagan forms as manifestations of culture and art, and then to put them in the service of the land, local communities, and the nation as a whole. This was very different from a poetics that found in rituals and practices a method of converting pagan religious forms while still recognizing their inherent religiosity. In this chapter I focus on the early works of John Milton because there we can find both kinds of poetics and thus can chart their development in the context of a wider religious discourse.

Milton's early work forms my locus of investigation because at this point in his career his ideas, like those of many of his contemporaries, were especially fluid. This is particularly evident when we look to his later, mature poetic output, because by the time Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, he had settled for himself the question of the value of sacred spaces. To set up one particular place as somehow more fundamentally sacred than others was to misunderstand the omnipresence of God and the proper way to express devotion to him. Adam memorably makes this very misunderstanding on his way out of Eden in *Paradise Lost*. As he laments to Michael:

This most afflicts me, that departing hence,
As from his face I shall be hid, deprived
His blessed countenance; here I could frequent,
With worship, place by place where he vouchsafed
Presence divine, and to my sons relate;
On this mount he appeared; under this tree
Stood visible, among these pines his voice
I heard, here with him at this fountain talked:
So many grateful altars I would rear
Of grassy turf, and pile up every Stone
Of lustre from the brook, in memory,
Or monument to ages, and thereon
Offer sweet smelling gums and fruits and flowers.²²⁵

²²⁵ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, in *The Poems of John Milton*, ed. John Carey and Alastair Fowler (London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1968), 11.315–27. All quotations from Milton's poetry are from this edition and will be cited in the text by book (where applicable) and line number.

For Adam, because every place in Eden seemed especially blessed, it appeared to him that the sacred was distributed “place by place where he vouchsafed / Presence divine.” But as the archangel Michael replies, this is not quite correct, because God’s presence is equally everywhere at once:

Not this rock only, his omnipresence fills
Land, sea, and air, and every kind that lives,
Fomented by his virtual power and warmed:
All the earth he gave thee to possess and rule,
No despicable gift; surmise not then
His presence to these narrow bounds confined
Or Paradise or Eden.

(11.336–42)

Confining God’s essence to “narrow bounds” is a mistake caused by reverence for custom and tradition; in this case, Adam has already begun to revere the accustomed places of devotion in the garden. Indeed, he had already begun to think about how he would take his sons to God’s wonted places and instruct them thence in their religion. Michael’s advice, on the other hand, is for Adam not to direct all of his devotion toward one place, not to settle on “this rock only.”²²⁶

Yet, in *Paradise Regained*, Satan challenges this straightforward notion of divine omnipresence. At the end of book 1, he argues to Jesus:

Thy father, who is holy, wise and pure,
Suffers the hypocrite or atheous priest
To tread his sacred courts, and minister
About his altar, handling holy things,
Praying or vowing, and vouchsafed his voice
To Balaam reprobate, a prophet yet
Inspired; disdain not such access to me.

(1.486–92)

²²⁶ For Milton’s arguments against “sedentarism” in *Paradise Lost* and other works, see Lawrence Manley, *Literature and Culture in Early Modern London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 571–76.

Just as Adam mistakenly thinks God “vouchsafed” his presence to a particular place, Satan argues that God’s working in the human world reveals that he must necessarily restrict his presence to certain persons or places. Both Satan’s arguments and Adam’s and Michael’s brief exchange have their roots in the religious culture of the 1630s and 40s, when Milton’s religious imagination was forged in the cultural controversies over sacred space.

I. Baal and the Places of Idolatry in Biblical Scholarship and Milton’s “Ode”

Satan’s language, especially, bridges the gap between Restoration religious controversy and the cultural polemics of the ‘30s and ‘40s, where much of the arguments over sacred spaces were constructed around notions of what properly formed a Christian church and its practices and what were pagan or non-Christian accretions on Protestant religious discipline. The two sets of passages quoted above raise two important problems whose development will guide this chapter. The first is the obvious problem of the localization of divine presence, which, as both Adam and Satan indicate, was often expressed in the form of altars and their proper role in the church. The altar controversy, as will be made clear later on, was itself part of a larger cultural debate about the mobility and permeability of the institution of the English church. The tradition and history of altars, as both pagan and Christian, complicate arguments over their correct usage. The second problem is more subtle and troubling, though. As Satan argues, God has sometimes seemingly allowed his presence to be “vouchsafed” to heathens and reprobates, or those outside of the Christian, or Jewish, dispensation. Adam, too, thought that God might “vouchsafe” his presence to certain places more than others. This was one of Milton’s favorite terms in his epics, because it expressed the ambiguous method of God’s interaction with the human world; to vouchsafe often implied condescension, which could

signal a kind of accommodation of divinity within the earthly realm. This seems to be what Satan implies when he brings up the figure of Balaam, an unwilling prophet whom God appropriated for his own purposes.

In fact, Balaam and the circumstances of his story in Numbers played an important role in the religious controversies of the 1630s and '40s. Balaam was a diviner, though not an Israelite. When the Israelites came to the land of Moab, the Moabite King Balak requested that Balaam curse the encroaching Israelites. God himself prevented Balaam, frustrating Balak's attempts to curse his people by making Balaam speak blessings instead of curses (cf. Numbers 22–24). Balaam himself was associated, both etymologically and ideologically, with the notorious idol of Baal-Peor. Milton, in his *Of Reformation* (1641), employs this association in his criticism of the Laudian church. In what had by then become a commonplace, Milton links the idolatry of Baal-Peor to Balaam's pernicious influence and links both to the current state of the English church: "Thus did the Reprobate hireling Preist *Balaam* seeke to subdue the Israelites to *Moab*, if not by force, then by this divellish *Pollicy*, to draw them from the Sanctuary of God to the luxurious, and ribald feasts of *Baal-peor*."²²⁷ It appears in Numbers that Balaam was eventually slain by Moses and his forces, because Balaam had counseled Israelite women "to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor" (31.16).²²⁸ The story of Balaam involves idolatry, to be sure, but even more importantly Balaam represents the notion that God, especially the Hebraic God, does indeed respect some places and peoples more than others.

²²⁷ Milton, *Of Reformation*, in *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, gen. ed. Don M. Wolfe, 8 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953–82), 1:589; hereafter YP. Further references to Milton's prose will be to this edition and will be cited by volume and page number in the text.

²²⁸ All citations of the Bible are from the English Authorized Version of 1611.

Interested readers could find this dimension of the Balaam story discussed in Henry Ainsworth's extensive commentary on the Pentateuch, first published in England in 1627. Ainsworth was a famous separatist who lived his adult life in Amsterdam; he was also one of the finest biblical scholars of his day. According to Ainsworth, Balak's purpose in cursing the Israelites was to weaken their relationship to God and thus to win over the Hebrew God to the side of Balak and the Moabites. As Balak says to Balaam: "Behold, there is a people come out of Egypt, which covereth the face of the earth: come now, curse me them; peradventure I shall be able to overcome them, and drive them out" (Numbers 22.11). To curse an enemy before attacking them was, Ainsworth explains, a common practice throughout the ancient world, and especially for the Romans, whose thoughts in this regard were well documented:

As Balak sought to turne the favour of God from Israel, and to bring his curse upon them by Balaams meanes: so other nations are said to use, before they warred against any people, to endeavour by prayers, sacrifices, and inchantments, to turne the favour of God from them. Before the Heathen Romans besieged any Citie, their Priests called out the god, under whose tutelage the Citie was, and promised him more ample honor or place among them *Plinie. hist. lib. 28. cap. 2*. The same is also by others; and the manner of doing it is recorded to bee first with a supplication to the gods, and that god specially which had taken upon him the defence of the citie, that he would forsake the people, citie, places, temples, and holy things. & having stricken a feare and forgetfulnesse in that people and citie, would come into Rome to accept of them, their places, temples, holy things, and citie, and to be provost unto them, their people and souldiers, vowing if so he would doe, to honour him with temples and games.²²⁹

Ainsworth sees parallels between the behavior of the ancient Israelites and other ancient peoples, especially when it came to the idea that some places could be the repositories of God's presence. The conflict that Baalak engineers involves the "favour" of God, and Ainsworth compares the idea of favor to a similar idea in polytheistic religions that god or

²²⁹ Ainsworth, *Annotations upon the Five Bookes of Moses* (London, 1627), 4.142–43. (This work is paginated according to the work that Ainsworth is annotating, in this case Numbers).

the gods might bestow their favor on one people or place more than others, and furthermore that this difference of bestowal is constitutive of social order and even of civil power. After describing the Roman beliefs, Ainsworth argues that in these “heathenish opinions and practices, there may some footsteps be seen of the ancient true Religion, for when God would deliver up Ierusalem into the hands of the Chaldeans, he first by a signe to his Prophet, signified his departure from, and forsaking of his Temple that stood herein” (p. 143). Balak’s curse was thus a symptom of a deeper set of cultural values in the ancient world, which revered certain places as the repositories of God’s power.

So strongly was Balaam associated with the abuse of sacred places, that he became a polemical term of abuse in the hands of those mired in the controversy over altars, which represented an early modern incarnation of the problem of locating the divine in a specific space.²³⁰ But Balaam was also notable as the first gentile prophet to foretell the birth of Christ. This aspect of the Balaam story emphasizes his role in calling the gentiles to knowledge of Christ’s birth and to their eventual conversion. In the commonplace book of Gilbert Frevile, a bishop in Durham in the early seventeenth century, the compiler has copied a poem on the subject of “the calling of the gentills,” which begins with the image of the “starr which Baa’lam foresaid should appear.”²³¹ William Austin describes Balaam’s privileged position as first of the gentile prophets in his *Devotionis Augustinianae Flamma* (1635), which he willed his wife to publish posthumously. He also willed that she send presentation copies to John Selden, Thomas Farnaby, and Ben Jonson, which provides an

²³⁰ See, for example, Richard Crakanthorpe, *Vigilius Dormitans: Romes Seer Overseene, Or a Treatise of the Fifth General Councell Held at Constantinople, Anno 553* (London, 1631), 90–91; Henry Burton, *A Replie to a Relation, of the Conference Between William Laude and Mr. Fisher, the Jesuite* (London, 1640), 73–74; and Peter Smart, “Articles, or Instructions for Articles, to be Exhibited by His Majesty’s High Commissioners, Against Mr. John Cosin [1630],” in *The Correspondence of John Cosin, D.D., Lord Bishop of Durham*, ed. George Ornsby, Publications of the Surtees Society, 2 vols. (London, 1869), 1:188.

²³¹ British Library, Egerton MS 2877, fol. 71r.

indication of his scholarly ambitions. Like Selden especially, Austin was very interested in the relationship between Christianity and non-Christian religions, especially those included in the general category of gentility. Balaam attains considerable importance for Austin, because in fact it was Balaam who first suggested that the gentile magi would be called by means of a star that is simultaneously a seed:

when Christ was (first of all) Promised to Adam; hee was called (Semen) the Seede of the Woman. And, when the Promise was iterated to Abraham; he was againe called, by the name of Seede; and God said, he would make his Seede, as the Starres; which are (as it were) the Shining Seede-Pearle of heaven. After which, when Balaam (who was the first, that ever divulged it to the Gentiles) came to speake of this Seede, which should come of Iacob, (Abrahams Grand-child) he called it a starre [*Orietur Stella in Iacob*, saith he,] There shall rise a Starre of Iacob.²³²

As Austin begins to discuss the nature of the calling of the gentiles, though, he is conscious of the idolatrous connections of the heathen prophet. Accordingly, he argues that God intentionally obscured the origins of the pagan magi, so as not to set up their country as preeminent over all the rest of the world. He toys with the idea that they may have been from Aram, Balaam's own country; but, he insists, the matter "stands unconcluded; since (peradventure) God would not have it certainly knowne; lest that Countrie (or Citie) whence the first-fruits of the Gentiles came to Christ, should (for that cause) claime Precedencie or Supremacie, over all the rest" (73). In contrast to Balaam, the idolater of Baal-Peor, future gentiles should have no potentially idolatrous sites of devotion.

The relationship between sacred spaces and heathen religion provides important background for Milton's poem about the transition from paganism to Christianity. In his "Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity," the action of Christianity displacing the pagan gods and emptying its temples generates the conflict and ambiguity that many scholars and

²³² Austin, *Devotionis Augustinianae Flamma, or, Certaine Devout, Godly, and Learned Meditations* (London, 1635), 61–62.

critics have tried to explain. Most have concluded that there is at least a little anxiety and hesitation about Milton's poetic dismissal of the pagan gods in the final stanzas.²³³ Many have also remarked that the poem presents some sort of crisis or turning point that involves the problem of tearing the gods from their shrines, which itself stands for the long process of converting paganism to Christianity.²³⁴ The very specificity of Milton's language in these stanzas, of altars, urns, temples, demonstrates the most difficult aspect of such conversion, namely the physical, and intellectual, ruins that paganism left behind after the sudden apparition of Christ. Scholars have only recently begun to discuss the mechanisms and implications of the conversion of pagan deities in their full, contextual complexity. Jason P. Rosenblatt has led the way, forcefully reminding us of the extent to which Milton relied on John Selden's *De Diis Syris* (1617; 2nd ed. 1628) for many of the more obscure pagan deities in the concluding catalogue of the poem and in his later catalogue in *Paradise Lost*.²³⁵ Rosenblatt also argues, rightly, that some of Selden's scholarly sympathies inform Milton's catalogue in his ode. An examination of some of Selden's scholarly insights will aid our understanding of Milton's poem and its background.

Selden is careful throughout his work to dissociate pagan religious practices from imputations of lewdness or impropriety. The crucial distinction, for Selden, is that the vices associated with idolatrous worship, including that of the idols of Baal, were rather set up and

²³³ For recent statements of this idea, see David Quint, "Expectation and Prematurity in Milton's 'Nativity Ode,'" *Modern Philology* 97 (1999): 195–219; and Stephen M. Buhler, "Preventing Wizards: The Magi in Milton's Nativity Ode," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 96 (1997): 43–57.

²³⁴ See J. Martin Evans, *The Miltonic Moment* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 23–37; David B. Morris, "Drama and Stasis in Milton's 'Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity,'" *Studies in Philology* 68 (1971): 207–22; Kathleen M. Swaim, "'Mighty Pan': Tradition and an Image in Milton's Nativity Hymn," *Studies in Philology* 68 (1971): 490–95; and T. K. Meier, "Milton's 'Nativity Ode': Sectarian Discord," *The Modern Language Review* 65 (1970): 7–10.

²³⁵ Rosenblatt, *Renaissance England's Chief Rabbi: John Selden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 74–92.

performed by the surrounding communities, such as that of the Moabites in Numbers. The names of idols in the Old Testament were actually, in most cases, names for *places*, derived from the towns or mountains where a certain divinity was worshipped. Accordingly, Selden frequently tries to restrain scholarly efforts to associate pagan religious practices with lewd, indecorous, and damnable acts. Take, for example, Selden's discussion of Baal-Tzephon. Selden structures his note first to discuss the mistaken, Rabbinic perception that this Baal is an idol constructed by Pharaoh to receive astrological influences as a guard against the Israelites escaping, a sort of spy in the desert. But this is not true at all, says Selden, though "nec piguit tamen in Syntagma nostrum de erroribus impiorum etiam & hunc magistrorum errorem retulisse" (2:291) (it does not grieve me to have brought up this scholarly error in my own book of heathen errors). For even the well-meaning scholar can make mistakes alongside the heathens. As Selden corrects this error, "Baaltzephon autem urbs seu oppidum erat" (ibid.) (Baal-Tzephon was rather a city or a town). The town was actually an outpost for the Egyptians, and the astrological associations were simply the result of the morally biased interpretations of later scholars. Indeed, the name referred to the fact that the town looked to the north.

When Selden moved on to Baal-Peor, he found similar problems with the scholarly tradition surrounding this idol. Many had thought, Selden notes, that Baal-Peor, or Baal-Phegor, was an analogue for Priapus, and that the idol was thus associated with obscene or lewd rituals. Some argued from a rather tortured etymology, as did St. Jerome, to the effect that "Phegor in lingua Ebraea Priapus appellatur" (2:308) (Phegor in the Hebrew tongue means Priapus). Selden himself had argued something similar when he published a preview of *De Diis Syris* in Samuel Purchas's *Purchas his Pilgrimage* in 1613: "*Baal. Phaeor . . .*

forsan *Priapus*, cui *obscoena pars sine veste aperta* erat, vti in Priapeis lusit ille, quod nec ab ipso *Phaeor* abludit” (Baal-Peor . . . perhaps Priapus, whose obscene part was open and unclothed, so that he can delight in Priapic rites, in this respect he does not differ from Peor).²³⁶ But Selden reversed his opinion for the first edition of *De Diis Syris* in 1617 and even added a chapter on Priapus in the 1628 edition. As he argues, “Foedae enim illae libidines, quae in historia Moabitidum recensentur, & vindicta veri Dei puniuntur, non minus sunt a Phegorii cultu alienae, quam Salomonis stupra a ritu Sidoniorum” (2:309). (these impure passions, which are recorded in the history of the Moabites, and which are punished by the vengeance of the true God, are no less alien to the worship of Phegor than Salomon’s debauchery was to the rites of the Sidonians). Selden’s point is that Salomon had engaged in the Sidonian rituals merely to get closer to the Sidonian women who also practiced those rites. The idolatry at Peor was not, in itself, lewd but was simply an accumulation of rites carried out in honor of the distant celestial bodies or the spirits of the departed. The collective morality of Moabite society is not wholly bound up with its religious rituals.

However, religious rituals and practices do serve to bind a given community by uniting the specifics of cultural memory to universal norms of religious experience. This sense of the purpose of ancient religion leads Selden to focus so much on the places and spaces of the pagan idols. Thus, in the chapter on Baal-Peor, Selden strives to separate the name “Peor” from any moral connotations. Rather, he says, “Mons enim in Moabitarum regione Peor dictus erat, ubi, ni fallor, Baal hic & delubro & sacris honorabatur” (ibid.) (In fact, there was a mountain called Peor in the land of the Moabites, where, unless I am mistaken, this Baal was honored with a shrine and religious rites). It is not surprising that the

²³⁶ Purchas, *Purchas his Pilgrimage, or Relations of the World and the Religions Obserued in All Ages and Places Discouered, from the Creation vnto this Present* (London, 1613), “Preface” (np).

site of such devotion should be on top of a mountain: “Montium summitates ante alia loca divinis rebus olim destinatas, non est cur adjungerem: id pueri sciunt” (ibid.) (There is no reason to add why mountain tops, rather than other places, were once dedicated to divine things: any schoolboy knows this). Every boy would know that mountains are closest to the celestial bodies, and that many gods were said to have been born on mountains, as was Zeus himself. So, Baal-Peor participates in a very common norm of ancient culture. And the actual rites of Peor that Selden does describe are those of standard cultural memory common to many other ancient religions: conventional “sacrificia mortuorum” (2:310) (sacrifices for the dead), justly done. The local details of these idols and their attendant rites provide Selden the leverage with which to undo previous scholarly mistakes. The pagan deities appear to be simply one part of the complex biblical societies with which they interact, and their rites more structural and utilitarian than absolutely damnable in themselves.

It is precisely the complexity and plurality of pagan deities, manifest in Selden’s polysemous portrayal of the biblical idols and their surroundings, that inform Milton’s ode on Christ’s nativity. In his concluding catalogue, the deities are often represented in their plural forms:

Peor, and Baalim,
 Forsake their temples dim,
 With that twice battered god of Palestine,
 And mooned Ashtaroth,
 Heaven’s queen and mother both,
 Now sits not girt with tapers’ holy shine
(197–202)

Peor was of course one of the Baalim, and the plural “Ashtaroth” encompasses the many incarnations of Ashtoreth. In Selden’s *De Diis Syris*, Ashtoreth also appears in many forms. Her name may derive, Selden thinks, from “Asheroth,” or “lucos” (sacred groves). Those

groves were then metonymically taken to signify the wooden idols that stood in her temples (2:343–44). There was also, as with the other idols Selden discusses, a city sharing the name of Ashtoreth, but the provenance of the name is unclear: “An ab hac urbe Deae, an a Dea urbi nomen translatum, an neutrum horum fuerit, non habeo dicere. Sane a lucis, urbibus, montibus, antris, ubi coluntur numina, nomina item accipi tam certum est, quam de huius Deae nomine omnia esse omnino incerta” (2:345). (Whether the name was applied from the city to the goddess or from the goddess to the city, or whether neither of these cases is true, I cannot say. Doubtless it is just as certain that names are taken from the groves, cities, mountains, and caves where spirits are worshipped, as that everything about the name of this goddess is altogether uncertain.) Selden’s correlation of the numinous with the nominal (numina/nomina) contributes to his overall thesis that pagan idols arose from the religious significance attached to specific places and sacred spaces, and that those names then transform and are themselves constitutive of even more religious meanings. Moreover, because of the centrifugal, various nature of pagan devotion in general, much of pagan religious worship was highly contingent on specific circumstances rather than based on a coherent set of doctrines, a point he would return to throughout his writings on non-Christian religions.²³⁷

Thus, it is appropriate that Milton chooses to focus on the ejection of the gods from their sacred places as evidence for the new order represented by Christianity; this new order unifies what were formerly local and variable modes of worship instantiated in the many versions of pagan deities. The poem poses an implicit question, though: what happens to the

²³⁷ In his *History of Tithes* (1618), for example, Selden argues that often the things given to the gods were only given customarily or occasionally, by vows made upon specific occasions (in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Wilkins, 3:1089–95). For a summary of Selden’s positions, and the response of Richard Montague arguing that tithes were consonant with pagan natural religion, see Jeremy Collier, *An Ecclesiastical History of Great Britain*, 9 vols. (London, 1840), 7:396–98.

sites of religious devotion inhabited by the pagan gods after their forceful ejection? At the very least, the poem adumbrates this question, since its action exists on several distinct temporal planes.²³⁸ The first is the instant of Christ's birth, which has immediate effects on mundane existence. But the musical harmony engendered by the birth has another effect; listening to it, "Time will run back, and fetch the age of gold" (135). The birth will replicate the lost age of innocence, but it will also eventually bring about "the world's last session" (163). The narrator himself is writing in a time before that last session, however; perhaps like Milton himself he is a *vates futururus* (poet yet-to-be), an epithet from the title page of the 1645 *Poems* that looks forward both to Milton's own poetic maturity and his role as prophet of things to come.²³⁹ Back in the past, the catalogue of pagan deities ousted from their temples fills in the time between the ancient golden age and the coming of Christ to earth. Since the time of primitive man, religious devotion has devolved into institutionalized forms of idol worship, localized in "Temples dim" (198). Christ's incarnation ends their influence, but also points ahead to the "last session," indicating the long space between his death and his return. The stanzas describing Christ are full of the abstract language of disembodied harmony and otherworldly power, the unseen, indeed barely perceived, forces of the heavens: "Ring out, ye crystal spheres, / Once bless our human ears, / (If ye have power to touch our senses so)" (125–27). This music originates, Milton writes, in the time

when of old the sons of morning sung,
While the creator great
His constellations set,
And the well-balanced world on hinges hung,
And cast the dark foundations deep,

²³⁸ Don Cameron Allen discusses the complex interplay in this poem between two temporal spaces, the past moment of Christ's incarnation and the present moment of Milton's writing; see his *The Harmonious Vision: Studies in Milton's Poetry*, 2nd rev. ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 24–29.

²³⁹ Milton, *Poems of Mr. John Milton both English and Latin, Compos'd at Several Times* (London, 1645).

And bid the welt'ring waves their oozy channel keep.
(119–24)

The poem's temporal frame stretches back even to the beginnings of creation, before plunging back into the particular moment of Christ's birth. In contrast to the airy flight of heavenly bodies and their music, the stanzas on the pagan gods emphasize the local, earthly places that have been given religious significance through the ages before Christian revelation.

In fact, Milton's poem explicitly represents the confrontation between a new religion, which has not yet inhabited its places of worship, and an old religion that has built up many layers of successive meaning derived from the land. Thus Milton's language becomes more concrete as he passes into the catalogue:

The lonely mountains o'er
And the resounding shore,
 A voice of weeping heard, and loud lament;
From haunted spring, and dale
Edged with poplar pale,
 The parting genius is with sighing sent,
With flower-inwoven tresses torn
The nymphs in twilight shade of tangled thickets mourn.
(181–88)

The mountains, shores, springs, dales, and groves are the sites of the power of idols, here expressed in the unifying concept of the "genius," a local power or deity that was worshipped in a particular place. As Milton would have read in Selden's book, this was precisely the most important part of idol worship, the degree to which idols were embedded with traditions associated with places, spaces, and the communities surrounding them.

For Milton, idolatry represented the portion of religious devotion that looked to settlement and traditions as the basis for worship. The long history of pagan religion up to the point of Christ's birth had generated many different forms of idol worship; each place had a

“genius” that governed the particular type of worship in that community. Milton reinforces this idea in the next stanza:

In consecrated earth,
And on the holy hearth,
 The lars, and lemures moan with midnight plaint,
In urns, and altars round,
A drear and dying sound
 Affrights the flamens at their service quaint;
And the chill marble seems to sweat
While each peculiar power forgoes his wonted seat.
(189–96)

Almost every line reaffirms the fact that pagan idols were bound to particular places and spaces, in “consecrated” and “holy” land, and on “altars round.” The flamens’ service is “quaint,” which means that their services are clever or intricate, suggesting a complex and ornate series of rites. And finally, there are many powers, each with a “wonted” seat of power that requires a specific set of services. There is, to be sure, a certain element of anti-Catholic sentiment in these lines, as some critics have found in the catalogue in general.²⁴⁰ But the main point of the catalogue seems rather to be a broader one still, a criticism of the tendency of all institutional religion to become entrenched, entangled, and enchanted with rituals and traditions. The sympathy that Milton injects into the poem—the “lonely mountains,” the moans and laments—suggests not that Milton banishes these gods from memory but that the false religion of idolatry needs to be confronted on its own terms. As Selden’s epigraph to *De Diis Syris* proclaims, quoting Lactantius, “Primus sapientiae gradus est, falsa intelligere” (2:202) (the first step toward wisdom is to understand false things).²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ See Barbara K. Lewalski, “Milton and Idolatry,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, vol. 43, no. 1 (2003): 215; and Stella P. Revard, *Milton and the Tangles of Neaera’s Hair: The Making of the 1645 Poems* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 64–83.

²⁴¹ On the importance of this idea for Selden, see Peter N. Miller, “Taking Paganism Seriously: Anthropology and Antiquarianism in Early Seventeenth-Century Histories of Religion,” *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 3 (2001): 199.

So, what happens to the vacant spaces of pagan religion? The poem ends abruptly after the catalogue of deities, leaving little resolved in terms of their afterlife. Should we assume that Christ has *purged* the pagan temples, leaving them available for Christian use? Christ's incarnation has ejected the pagan gods, but has it completely destroyed them? On the one hand, Christianity is attaining a kind of temporal power over the actual spaces once inhabited by pagan worshippers. If the temporal power is absolute, then it might be allowable to inhabit pagan temples and, perhaps, pagan intellectual spaces as well. However, the ambivalence in Milton's poem regarding the pagan deities suggests that Christianity's temporal power might not be absolute. In this sense, pagan space would indeed remain tainted by unreformed traditions and customs. The very nature of the development of Christianity matters for how we read Milton's evocation of the flight of the pagan gods.

And in fact, the boundaries of Christianity, and its relationship with other beliefs and practices, were subjected to intense interrogation in the years before and after 1629. The altar controversy especially threw arguments about cultural and religious inheritance and development into stark relief. What might seem like inconsequential ideas about the relationship between ancient religions increasingly attained contemporary relevance as many writers became engaged with the problem of sacred space. What pagans practiced, alongside Jewish and early Christian practices, could thus serve to define contemporary matters of religious discipline in novel ways.

II. Pagan Practices, the Right of Asylum, and the English Altar Controversy

As Henry Ainsworth constructed the ceremonial law, it encompassed practices that were common throughout the ancient world. We have already seen his willingness to link Hebraic

religious habits to the habits of the gentiles in the story of Baal. But Ainsworth continues that formula throughout his book. Examples abound of his view of all ancient religions sharing a common set of ritual imperatives. In his commentary on chapter 4 of Genesis, Ainsworth relates the ubiquity of the kinds of offerings made by Cain and Abel:

Kain brought *of the fruit of the ground*, which custome continued; so that in Israel men might eate neither bread nor corne, till they had brought an offering unto God, Lev. 23. 14. Among the Greekes also they used to sacrifice the fruits of the earth, *Homer Iliad.* 1. and Numa ordeyned the like among the Romans, who *tasted not new corne or wine, before the Priests had sacrificed the first fruits*, saith *Plinie in book 18. chap. 2.* and in the Roman lawes of the twelve Tables, the same oblation of corne is commanded: *Derelig. tit. 1. lex. 4.* The like was for sacrificing of beasts, as Abel did: which was used of Israel, and of all Nations till the comming of Christ.

(1.21)

Here was a practice that had continued not only among the Israelites, but was also common among the Greeks and early Romans as well. But, crucially, such commonality of religious practice was abrogated by the coming of Christ. Throughout his commentary, Ainsworth draws on the wide variety of sources relating the details of pagan religious customs, all in order to compare those customs to those of the ancient Hebrews. Examples abound: the Hebrew ministers have sacrificial duties akin to those of Greek kings (1.57); the Israelites worshipped idols with dancing, just like the gentiles (2.17); and while leavened bread was prohibited at the paschal feast, the Roman *flamen dialis* was not allowed to touch leavening materials either (2.41). Ainsworth's perspective is thoroughly comparative throughout.

But while Ainsworth generally sees conformity between rituals of ancient Hebrews and later gentiles, he sometimes cites evidence that the different religions had a more contentious relationship, especially when it came to the places or monuments of worship. In chapter 21 of Genesis, "Abraham planted a grove in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God" (verse 33). Ainsworth argues that

it is probable, that this plantation was for religious use, which before the law given by Moses, might bee lawfull; and was used generally of the nations, Deut. 12. 2. but after was forbidden, when God had chosen a place of worship. Yet as from Abrahams example, offering his sonne Isaak, Gen. 22. the Iewes would superstitiously sacrifice their children, Ier. 7. 31. and 19. 5. so from Abrahams grove, they used *groves* for religious use, and sacrificed under *greene trees*: 2 King. 17. 10. Ier. 17. 2. Esay 57. 5. But God forbad such things, Deut. 16. 21. yet the heathen Romans commanded them, saying, *Lucos in agris habento: Leg. 12. tab. de relig. lex. 2.*” (1.83)

For Ainsworth, there is merely a difference of degree between the two kinds of superstition, though the development of religious practice under the Hebrews begins to the approach Christian discipline more nearly than the pagan custom. The Hebrew God occasionally institutes changes in religious practice that necessitate the alteration of heathen materials of worship. For example, in Genesis chapter 28, Jacob set up a pillar and called the place Bethel [house of the Lord] (verses 18–19). Ainsworth comments on the pillar,

or *statue*, that is, *a monument or title erected and standing up*: This was here for a religious signe, as altars also were, Esay 19. 19. and Iakob did the like afterward, Gen. 35. 14. But when the Law was given by Moses, no *pillars* might any more be set up, Lev. 26. 1. Hos. 10. 1. but all such as the heathens had erected, were to be broken downe; Deut. 7. 5. and 12. 3. There were also pillars for civill monuments, Gen. 35. 20. 2 Sam. 18. 18. (1.107)

In this case, God’s command necessitated that the Israelites not only change their own habits but that they destroy the pagan sites of worship as well. In Ainsworth’s commentary we encounter two ways that ancient religions related to each other.

There were many structural similarities and similarities of duty, which Ainsworth would term superstitions. But it also appears that ancient Judaism was successively refined by God’s commands, which differentiated Hebraic religion from that of the pagans. At the same time, however, Christ’s incarnation changed the rules of the game; after his birth, a new set of disciplines arose.

Ainsworth's was one way to answer the problem of pagan spaces and their attendant rituals raised by Milton's poem; according to his commentary, after Christ's birth these rituals were totally abrogated by Christianity. But other scholars had a different perspective on the early years of the church, in which the early Christians struggled to differentiate themselves from Jewish and pagan customs. Other writers took up where Ainsworth left off, extending the narrative of religious comingling into the Christian and modern age. Lancelot Andrewes, bishop of Winchester and one of the most famous preachers of his day, wrote an extraordinarily learned account of the inheritance of pagan religious discipline in the Protestant English church. The provenance of this text is itself extraordinary, too. It was edited and published in 1653, 27 years after Andrewes' death, by Edward Leigh, who was no friend of Cromwell's and an "intimate of James Ussher."²⁴² As Leigh describes the treatise:

upon speech between Bishop *Andrewes* and a Gentleman his neer neighbour about the Ceremonies, the Bishop a while after, and a quarter of a year before his death, delivered this to him as a collection of his own about that subject, which he had not time (he said) to polish and lick over. Had the Authour intended it for the Presse, it would no doubt have been more perfect, but I thought it worthy in regard of the Authour and Argument (which few have so generally handled) to be published.²⁴³

Leigh is correct in that the treatise does handle a subject that few wrote on so forthrightly. In 1653, however, the quasi-Laudian emphasis on the continuities between pagan and Christian notions of ecclesiastical discipline had to be distanced from the editor. As Leigh disclaims, "I do not thereby avow and justifie superstitious and needlesse Rites, as if the observation of them was necessary when they are imposed by Authority, nor every thing else therein contained" (sig. A3v). Andrewes' work does indeed attempt to justify the relationship

²⁴² Peter McCullough, ed., *Selected Sermons and Lectures*, by Lancelot Andrewes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 442.

²⁴³ Andrewes, *A Learned Discourse of Ceremonies Retained and Used in Christian Churches* (London, 1653), sigs. A3r–v.

between pagan and Christian practices in terms of traditions and practices that are approved by the authority of states and religious institutions. It is worth lingering over Andrewes' arguments and sources since, as Leigh said, there were very few works that attempted something similar in the early seventeenth century.

His account employs a methodology similar to Ainsworth's, but approaches the issue with arguments developed from Richard Hooker, as Andrewes makes clear at the beginning of his treatise. Andrewes gives a concrete answer to Milton's implicit question about the remains of pagan religion, with Hooker as his guide:

it is expressed by St. Paul, it is lawful for a Christian, so it be without scandal, to eat those things which are consecrated unto idols. Honestly then writes Mr. Hooker, that which hath been ordained impiously at the first, may wear out by tract of time, as the names of our heathen months and days used throughout all christendom without any scandal.²⁴⁴

In fact, the stated purpose of his treatise is to show that many "paynim ceremonies were retained in England after Christianity was received" (365). Andrewes addresses one of the most common arguments for such ceremonial inheritance, the injunction in Deuteronomy that Jews may wed a foreign wife, "her nails and hair being pared and shaven" (367).

Andrewes assumes that what comes from tradition is actually the most worthwhile for a religious community to imitate, the very position that many Presbyterians and independents would come to reject in the '30s and '40s. "This pedigree," he writes, "of our ceremonies staineth not our christian policy, for that all good orders of the heathens came by tradition, or reading or seeing the ceremonies that God commanded among the Jews in the land of

²⁴⁴ Andrewes, *A Discourse of Ceremonies Retained and Used in Christian Churches*, in *The Works of Lancelot Andrewes*, vol. 6 (1846; repr., New York: AMS Press, 1967), 367. Further references to this work are to this volume and will be cited in the text by page number.

promise” (368). And in fact, to deny the efficacy of tradition is to fall into the Manichaean heresy, a kind of Gnosticism that denies the value of all earthly rituals and traditions (366).²⁴⁵

But Andrewes thereafter introduces an even more forceful point, that ceremonies may become licit once given practical form in a religious commonwealth. “You may observe out of Josephus in the latter time of the Jews’ government,” he argues, “that Herod their first king brought much of the roman-heathenish discipline into their policy, and in this respect that many of our Christian ceremonies were formerly heathen, and afore that used in the commonwealth of Jewry, wherein God was the lawgiver” (368). This idea becomes Andrewes’ transition into his larger argument that “the ampleness of the common law” has admitted into England ecclesiastical laws before any kind of Catholic canon law; indeed those early laws were simply the “civil ordinance of the magistrate in the ages most remote” (369). Here Andrewes begins to defend paganism as a state religion, principally a system of religious discipline and practice that blended sacred and civic duties. Ceremonies themselves may be things indifferent, “but yet when they are enacted in a christian state, and made the laws of the land, they must be obeyed of necessity as unto a thing not indifferent” (370). Andrewes paraphrases Christopher St. Germain to the effect that “the laws of men not contrary to the law of God ought to be kept even of the clergy in the law of the soul” (ibid.). Andrewes’ main point is potentially very persuasive: if we accept that the common law originated time out of mind, and if we admit that the common law incorporates specific

²⁴⁵ Andrewes points to St. Augustine’s *Contra Faustum*, wherein Augustine argues that paganism is actually closer to Christianity than Manichaeism, because both find objects of devotion in the earthly world. See Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, in *Patrologia Latina, Series Prima*, ed. J.-P. Migne, vol. 42 (Paris, 1845), book 20.

cultural habits and practices into its evolving systems of laws, then we will have to admit that many laws even now in effect had their origin among the ancient pagans.²⁴⁶

The implications of this position are also potentially momentous. Andrewes does not quite argue that there are certain tenets of natural religion that might obtain everywhere despite God's specific ordinance, but he comes close. Rather, he argues that ceremonies might touch on something eternal and transcendently true, but that they might also simply be indifferent; it is this indifference that matters, though. The standard of approbation is use, rather than belief, discipline rather than particular doctrine. This position clarifies what Hooker had left as a hazy area of his work on ecclesiastical laws. Thus, although some pagan ceremonies were imported directly into Catholic worship, some ceremonies were also incorporated into Roman legal code; the manner of incorporation matters too, for Andrewes. He argues that it is true that the Catholic church structures its ecclesiastical rules according to the Roman legal code, and that those rules are often derived from pagan ceremonies. But the Roman legal code itself also adapted pagan customs, and while the Catholic use of pagan customs is "superfluous and wicked" (370), Andrewes takes it as a matter of course that the Roman emperors, when they became Christian, retained many of the precepts contained in the Digests (373–74). State power, if just, may freely determine the "ecclesiastical ceremonies of the heathen which are or may be lawfully used in ours or any other christian state" (373). The crucial term is "christian state," for Andrewes presupposes not total liberty of conscience but rather a liberty informed by obedience.

As Debora Shuger argues, this perspective tends to see the entire disciplinary inheritance of the church not as "divinely grounded in natural law" but as "legitimated

²⁴⁶ John Fortescue claimed that British common law was even more ancient than the laws of the Romans, and therefore that much more authoritative; see *De Laudibus Legum Angliae, Writen by Sir Iohn Fortescue L. Ch. Iustice, and after L. Chancellor to K. Henry VI* (London, 1616), fols. 38r–39v.

exclusively by the need for social order.” Thus all ceremonies and ecclesiastical policies have the potential to become “matters of civil religion.”²⁴⁷ But it is not simply the idea of borrowing that leads Andrewes to speculate on civil religion; his point is that the pagan rituals themselves tended to structure Christian religious government as a civil institution. It was the very nature of the pagan borrowings, their specific character even as practices indifferent to salvation, that influenced the Christian polity. Andrewes’ theoretical positions on state and legal authority thus also inform his pronouncements upon the specifics of pagan inheritance, and especially the matter of the appropriation of pagan places of worship among Christian religious polities. Andrewes argues that the very use of sacred places was a mark of the increasing civility of pagan peoples. Whereas formerly pagan temples were merely sepulchers, “when the people heathen began to be civil, their temples were built, and altered fairer both within and without.—Moreover the very name of the heathen assemblies among the Athenians and the cities of Asia, was *ecclesia*, which retaineth the name of the churches among the christians at this day” (374). He also argues that very early Christian churches were round, much like temples to Vesta, Bacchus, and the Sun, and that Numa forbade the worship of images in the temples. But the more important question was what happened to those pagan temples with the advent of Christianity.

Andrewes finds that ultimately many Christian authorities chose to retain pagan temples as places of worship and devotion. Here he uses the urgency and immediacy that Milton lent to his description of the pagan gods ousted from their temples to explain why Christian kingdoms often appropriated those same temples and spaces.

²⁴⁷ Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics, and the Dominant Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 66. For a discussion of medieval and early modern notions of civil religion and their pagan origins, see Mark Silk, “Numa Pompilius and the Idea of Civil Religion in the West,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72 (2004): 863–96.

But yet without controversy, when kingdoms and states turned from idolatry or paganism to christianity, and that in short time (so powerful was the Holy Ghost), many of the heathen temples were not overthrown, but of necessity, after some ceremonies accomplished, were used for Christian prayers and assemblies; by means whereof the alteration in the state was not so great, the temporal world with Democritus being not to be new made *ex atomis*, and men sooner and easier embraced public christian religion: and this is the reason that by the common law of England a man may be said to be patron of a christian church although he never built it, if he only endow the church with revenues. (376)

It was the speed, the very unexpectedness of Christian revelation that necessitated such a gradual transition from paganism. And again, for Andrewes the most important consideration is the impact of new beliefs and practices on the stability and continuity of the state. For Christianity to be a successful institutional religion, it needed to appropriate the civic religious forms of pagan culture. This was no sin, according to Andrewes, as long as the old temples were “hallowed and sanctified” by Christians (*ibid.*).

Andrewes also perceived the complex dynamic of church and state that the issue of sacred space raised for the early Christians. State authorities can grant heathen spaces to the church, but the church also has a role to play in their sanctification. He argues:

as lawfully the civil and supreme magistrates gave the temples of the heathens to the christians, as well St. Augustine notes in one epistle, that the christian emperors did pass over to the true catholics the churches and revenues which were given by donatists to error and schism; yet, before the heathen temples were consecrated and purged, the christians would not use any christian service in them. (378)

State power was thus also constrained by the necessity to respect the power of sanctification. Andrewes recounts the story, out of the fourteenth-century Greek historian Nicephorus Callistus Xanthopoulos, that Constantine made a portable church to carry with him when he engaged in military campaigns (*ibid.*). Nicephorus calls this a “μεταφορητήν εκκλησίαν” (moveable church), which Constantine built so that he would not have to worship in

unconsecrated places.²⁴⁸ Concepts of sacred places were indeed in a kind of transitional moment, necessitated of course by the religious, political, and social ramifications of the process of converting paganism to Christianity.

Andrewes was remarkably prescient in his recognition of the cultural complexity of late antiquity, much of which crystallized around the problem posed to the differentiated powers of church and state by the changes in conceptions of sacred space. As the story of Constantine and his portable church demonstrates, the awareness of the need to convert pagan spaces of worship was widespread. Indeed, Constantine has been at the center of modern scholarly attempts to reconstruct the transition to Christianity as a state religion in late antiquity. As Andrewes anticipated, scholars have found a high degree of pagan remnants in the early church and have concluded that any kind of “transition” must be seen as very gradual indeed. As Gerald Bonner argues, “the extinction of paganism and its supersession by Christianity, despite the factors of legal coercion and physical violence which accompanied them, are best understood not as a catastrophic event but as an evolutionary process.”²⁴⁹ Constantine of course did introduce ever stricter prohibitions against pagan religious practices, closed many temples, and in general avoided pagan sites altogether.²⁵⁰ Christian churches were built on pagan sites, but not until memories of pagan

²⁴⁸ See Nicephorus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, in *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne, vol. 145 (Paris, 1865), col. 1320.

²⁴⁹ Bonner, “The Extinction of Paganism and the Church Historian,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 35 (1984): 356. See also Helen Saradi-Mendelovici, “Christian Attitudes toward Pagan Monuments in Late Antiquity and their Legacy in Later Byzantine Centuries,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 40 (1990): 47–61; and Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire, A.D. 100–400* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 74–85.

²⁵⁰ See T. D. Barnes, “Constantine’s Prohibition of Pagan Sacrifice,” *American Journal of Philology* 105 (1984): 69–72.

practices had faded.²⁵¹ Constantine himself often conceived of the church in essentially pagan terms; for the emperor, when the ministers of the church “offer worship to God they confer an incalculable benefit upon the state” (351). This symbiosis of church and state was one of the primary legacies of pagan religious thought passed on to Christian leaders.

This period of history proved quite receptive to early modern historical parallels in the course of scholarly and religious investigation of early ecclesiastical history. And indeed, for modern scholars, too, this period has provided the basis for dueling conceptions of the relationship between religious and secular affiliation. If Constantine and the Theodosian emperors were influenced by a pagan worldview, they also had to contend with more ascetic notions of what it meant to participate in true, Christian religion. As Peter Brown has argued extensively, increasingly in these decades Christian writers such as Augustine argued that paganism was not something that could be ignored and indifferently incorporated into a church that enjoyed supernatural superiority; indeed, that very supernatural superiority tended to allow Christians to continue viewing the lower, quotidian operations of the state church as similarly sacred, endowed with the authority of the one, true God. For Augustine this was dangerous, and he tended to argue that pagan incursions into the church and state needed to be purged and a more absolute divide set up between the two “cities” of his *City of God*.²⁵² Early modern scholars of this period of history were sensible to the same conflicts as they studied the early Christian emperors.

Unsurprisingly, one of the most pressing concerns for in the early Christian empire was what to do with the pagan temples, shrines, and altars that remained standing and

²⁵¹ Saradi-Mendelovici, “Christian Attitudes toward Pagan Monuments,” 50.

²⁵² See Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 8–26; and Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, AD 200–1000* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 34–53.

provided unavoidably reminders of the empire's bisected religious heritage. The eloquent Libanius, a Hellenist who was sympathetic to the Theodosian regime, produced an noteworthy oration to Theodosius about this very subject, the destruction of pagan temples. This oration found an appropriate editor in Jacques Godefroy, a professor at the University of Geneva, who in the 1630s was working on an edition of the entire Theodosian Code, the set of laws partially concerned with explicating the relationship of the new religion with the old religions of the empire. He edited Libanius's oration in 1634 and dedicated it to Sir William Boswell, an English diplomat intimately connected both to major scholars of antiquity such as Selden and G. J. Vossius and to Laud himself and others in the religious establishment. The dedication to Boswell reflects the growing interest in early imperial Christianity and church history from this period, upon both of which Libanius's oration sheds light.

Godefroy's short opening treatise assumes that the fourth century saw the triumph of institutional Christianity but at the same time the failure of that institution to completely purge paganism. His introductory remarks reflect the complexity of the religio-political maneuverings of the early empire. After noting that Libanius's oration is a significant contribution to ecclesiastical history, he argues,

Cuius opinor haud vulgaris ea quoque portio est, uti liquido constare possit, quibusnam gradibus paganae superstitionis error, qui tribus saeculis in fidem Christianam imponenter saevierat, quarto demum saeculo Evangelicae luci toto gradu cesserit, locumque fecerit: per quos item Principes, quid quantumve illi detractum, a quibus potissimum viris negotium istud administratum: quibus rationum momentis erroris inlecebras, & in his Templis, adimere paulatim visum fuerit. Viceversa, quam contumaces sese pagani hanc in partem praeberint: quibus inter haec argumentis se suaque defendere saterint: qui qualesque viri suffliminandae rei Gentilitiae accesserint.²⁵³

[I think that this forms no vulgar part of this history, as it is able to clearly show the process by which the error of pagan superstition, which raged

²⁵³ Godefroy, "Epistola Dedicatoria," in Libanius, *Pro Templis Gentilium non Excindendis Oratio*, ed. Godefroy (Geneva, 1634), sigs. ¶iiv–¶iiir. My translation follows.

impotently in the first three centuries of the Christian faith, finally ceded in the fourth century to the light of the gospel, and gave way all at once. Likewise it shows under which princes just how much was detracted from paganism, and by which men this business was principally managed; and by which impulses of reasoning, little by little, it came to seem like a good idea to seize the allurements of pagan error, including temples themselves. On the other side, it shows how the pagans themselves became stubborn on their own behalf, and with what arguments about these things they strived to defend themselves and their things; and what men these were who were hostile to the repression of the gentile way of life.]

Godefroy reports two, somewhat conflicting, notions of the development of Christianity in relation to paganism. First, he argues that paganism ceded to its Christian competitor all at once, *toto gradu*. But then, as the new religion developed it needed administrators, whose decisions blended the two religions. This later process occurred little by little, *paulatim*, whereby the men in charge of the empire thought it was a good idea to try to convert the remnants of paganism to their own purposes.

Libanius himself is a representative of this gradual process of re-paganizing the Christian empire. Godefroy, like Peter Brown many years later, is also struck by the great *license* that Libanius seems to arrogate for himself.²⁵⁴ Godefroy notes that Libanius was free to malign Constantine for despoiling the revenues of the temples and coming to a very bad end for doing so. Still more licentious was Libanius's praise of the next emperor, the pagan Julian. Godefroy argues, after all this,

Ut dubitare liceat, maiorne illius licentia, an Theodosii tum lenitas extiterit, qui haec atque id genus alia tam aequo tulerit animo: eo etiam, ut quod eiusdem Libanii testimonio & exemplo patet, paganos non eo minus ad summas quoque dignitates subvexerit, epulisque adhibuerit. (sig. [¶4v])

[That one may doubt which is greater, the license of Libanius or the leniency of Theodosius, who bore all these things and others of this kind with such a calm spirit; even to the point, as is made clear from the testimony and example of Libanius himself, that he advanced pagans to no less than the highest political ranks, and invited them to his feasts.]

²⁵⁴ Brown, *Authority and the Sacred*, 49–51.

Godefroy's interest seems chiefly historical, but this period obviously has much contemporary relevance. For instance, Godefroy also finds much of interest in Libanius's arguments "de Religione non cogenda" (that religion should not be forced). As Libanius writes, "for these are things to which men ought to be persuaded, not compelled. And when a man cannot accomplish that, and yet will practise this, nothing is effected, and he may perceive the weakness of the attempt. It is said that this is not permitted by their own laws, which commend persuasion, and condemn compulsion. Why then do you run mad against the temples? When you cannot persuade, you use force. In this you evidently transgress your own laws."²⁵⁵ Libanius's appeal to moderation in religious outreach takes its force from his defense of conformity and submission to state authority. A leader both religious and political should, in theory, want to export the same stable order he expects in the state into the religious realm.

When he turned the importance of sacred space, Libanius also argues for pagan temples as emblems of social stability. He makes a very common rhetorical gesture at the opening of his oration, associating the building of temples and sacred sites with the idea of security, both literal and metaphorical safety from attack: "and in every city . . . next to the walls were temples and sacred edifices raised, as the beginning of the rest of the body. For from such governors they expected the greatest security" (Lardner ed., 8:442; Godefroy ed., 8–9). Even more importantly, if the temples are despoiled it will upset the traditional agricultural way of life that sustains much of the empire. As he argues, if the temples are despoiled it prevents tributes being taken from the local farmers, because they will not work as hard if they believe their labors are not watched over by a god. Libanius acknowledges

²⁵⁵ Libanius, "For the Temples," trans. Nathaniel Lardner in *The Works of Nathaniel Lardner*, 11 vols. (London, 1788), 8:448; see also Libanius, *Oratio pro Templis*, ed. Godefroy, 18.

that religious practices in some sense can anchor a community and make it best able to contribute to society as a whole. The overarching problem, though, is the negotiation between the very real effects of religious furor, in this case in Christians, and the practical strokes necessary to contain such furor within imperial authority. Libanius sets up a contrast between the religiously inspired Christians and the loyal, obedient, peaceful pagans who bow to the authority of the state. This way of describing the effect state power could have on religious life obviously had great contemporary value in the 1620s and 30s.

In fact, the view of Libanius, that religious benefits are interrelated to the benefits of a Christian state, was shared generally by many ecclesiastical writers during the Theodosian dynasty.²⁵⁶ Milton himself, and he was by no means alone, was devoting serious consideration in the 1630s and 40s to this period of church history, the political and religious problems it faced, and the solutions it lent to them.²⁵⁷ Apart from being a subject of general interest to theologians and scholars, this dynasty also drew the attention of early modern scholars who were investigating the origins of the idea of asylum and its relationship to sacred spaces in the early years of the church and late antiquity. The idea that some places might confer special meaning and protection was certainly inherited from earlier religions and was reinforced by the fact that pagan sites continued to have significance across Europe as the empire receded and local religious imperatives established new sacred places. The spirit of pagan place-devotion, if not always the exact sites, translated easily into forms of Christian place-devotion.²⁵⁸ The concept of asylum proved a nodal point for arguments about the role of sacred places in church and state. Early modern scholars would have known the

²⁵⁶ See Bonner, "Extinction of Paganism," 350n50.

²⁵⁷ For the works of ecclesiastical history Milton was reading, see *YP*, 1:376–77.

²⁵⁸ See John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 57.

policy of asylum in the early church from the Theodosian Code of 392 AD, which enacted a very specific law of asylum; but this law allowed scholars to assume that a larger body of laws concerning asylum was in place, which would allow for modifications. The emperors Arcadius (of the eastern empire) and Honorius also introduced legislation about asylum, concerning Jews who applied for asylum by promising to convert to Christianity.²⁵⁹ The question that interested many early modern scholars was whether the power of granting asylum was a secular or a religious one. Because the power of asylum was partially a legal one, the power to obviate a crime, it was conceivable that the power originated with the state; but because an asylum could prevent violence and bloodshed it might properly be classified as a religious prerogative.

This aspect of the Theodosian religio-political negotiation proved a crucial point of scholarly investigation to those who were interested in the progress of church-state relations in the seventeenth century. The question was certainly not unimportant in seventeenth-century England. The right of asylum had long been important in English society and had been defended by its courts. But during the reign of Henry VIII the force of asylum as a legal concept had diminished, and in 1623 Parliament abolished it altogether, stating “that no Sanctuarie or Priviledge of Sanctuary shalbe hereafter admitted or allowed in any case.”²⁶⁰ Canon lawyers and anti-papal republicans alike had for years argued, though for different reasons, that the right of granting asylum was properly derived from human authority rather than divine law. The Jesuit scholar Pietro Gambacurta argued that granting asylum was

²⁵⁹ See Jan Hallebeek, “Church Asylum in Late Antiquity: Concession by the Emperor or Competence of the Church?” Paper presented at the 57th session of the *Société Internationale Fernand de Visscher pour l’Histoire des Droits de l’Antiquité*. <<http://dare.ubvu.vu.nl/bitstream/1871/9006/1/church%20asylum.pdf>>

²⁶⁰ Qtd. in J. Charles Cox, *The Sanctuaries and Sanctuary Seekers of Mediaeval England* (London: G. Allen & Sons, 1911), 329.

merely a human custom that was given force by secular lawgivers.²⁶¹ Paolo Sarpi weighed in on the debate in 1627, arguing that the original right of asylum in the fourth century was granted by imperial authority, which was exercised to control abuses of ecclesiastical privilege. The first historical evidence about asylum was the edict of Arcadius and Honorius concerning Jews who sought asylum in exchange for conversion. But until then there was no mention made of the immunity of churches even among the pagan Romans. Ecclesiastical immunity, he argues, was introduced to the Christian state *de facto*, from the practice of infidel debtors seeking relief from their debts in exchange for promising to convert to Christianity.²⁶² As he concludes, “Ecclesiasticos Praesules iis temporibus ne cogitasse quidem ad officium suum pertinere, ut leges aut constitutiones conderent de Ecclesiarum immunitate, immo vero, cum certo scirent, Principis esse id statuere, ab eo leges accepisse” (13) (Indeed, in those times the church leaders did not think that it was part of their authority to make laws and ordinances about the immunity of churches, no indeed, because they knew for certain that it was the duty of the prince to make such laws, and they accepted those laws from him). Sarpi’s point is that the state always had the right to legislate wherever crime was concerned; the English Parliament had agreed and had ended a system it associated with the overstepping of clerical authority.²⁶³

However, this conclusion in favor of state control over sacred space reflected ongoing discussion about the very nature of religious practice among Christians and non-Christians

²⁶¹ Gambacurta, *Commentariorum De Immunitate Ecclesiarum in Constitutionem Gregorii XIV. Pont. Max. Libri Octo* (Lyon, 1622), 112–202 and passim.

²⁶² Sarpi, *De Iure Asylorum Liber Singularis . . . Accesserunt Viri Eruditi De Asylis Collectanea* (Venice, 1627), 13–19. I will cite this work in the text by page number.

²⁶³ Scholars have noted the increasing nationalization of concepts of asylum in the early modern period; see, e.g., Philip Marfleet, “Understanding ‘Sanctuary’: Faith and Traditions of Asylum,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 24 (2011): 447–49.

alike. For Sarpi, these arguments were buttressed by the nature of sacred places even in pagan cultures, and his work stretches back to describe the nature of asylum among the Greeks and Romans as well. An important focal point for arguments over ancient asylum, Romulus and his sacred space on the Capitoline might be viewed as a religious site of refuge that had also contributed to the creation of the Roman state. But Sarpi wants us to view this act from a different perspective:

Romulus in Romae aedificatione, immunitatem cuidam loco tribuit, qui hac de causa Graeca voce Asylum appellatus est; non divini cultus causa, ne ut in eo sibi subjecti populi sese adversus justitiam protegerent: sed quo novam redderet civitatem incolis refertam, constituit finitimorum populorum subjectos, qui ob delicta commissa, vel aes alienum in eorum regionibus contractum, ad Asylum confugerent, quo deinde Romani incolae essent, defendi debere adversus omnes qui adversus eos jus haberent. (167–68)

[Romulus, in building Rome, gave immunity to a certain place, which is called for this reason “Asylum” in Greek; but not because it was a place of divine worship, nor so that in that place people subject to Romulus might protect themselves from justice. Rather, it was a place where he could found a new city by filling it with foreigners, and so he made subjects out of neighboring peoples, who could flee to his asylum on account of crimes committed or money borrowed in their own lands. They would then become Roman residents, to be defended against all who had a legal right against them.]

This foundational act defined asylum for the Romans, and indeed, Sarpi argues, religious asylum was extremely uncommon among them. He also argues that religious asylum was never meant to impede justice, only to grant the weak, such as mistreated slaves, access to the process of justice (166). He included at the end of this work a collection of writers, classical and modern, who had written on asylum, and their conclusions are much the same. For Sarpi, it appears, the entire concept of a “sacred space” depends on an original act of institution by a state authority. This does not preclude sacred space from religious significance, of course; it simply means that the religious significance of such places is

always bound up with the rites done in that place and their effects in the secular realm. Sarpi mixes, probably purposefully, religious and legal terminology in his summary of Romulus's institution of his asylum: "Romulus suum Asylum aperuit ad lucum opacum & vallem inter Capitolium & arcem seu Palatium in sacro loco quod Quercetum vocitatur, hic locus sacer & consecrationis lege tutus a direptione quo profugii libertatisve causa Ius erat confugere, ad quem confugientes sine summo piaculo avelli non poterant" (184–85) (Romulus founded his asylum in a dark grove and vale between the Capitoline and the citadel, or Palatine, in a sacred place which is called the oak forest; this place is sacred and by a law of consecration it is protected from pillage. In this place there was a law so that if people fled there for refuge or freedom they could not be taken from there without committing the gravest kind of offense). Certainly, he argues, no asylum suffers homicides to shelter; rather, they were all set up for the truly *innocent*, those who only initially appeared to have committed a crime, such as Orestes, or slaves fleeing abusive masters. Milton, too, wrote in his commonplace book that "Refuge from hard-hearted masters was given to slaves by civil law" (YP, 1:411). Sarpi finds an example of this idea in Plutarch's life of Theseus to the effect that Theseus's tomb granted "free libertie of accesse for all slaues & poore men, (that are afflicted & pursued, by any mightier then themselues)."²⁶⁴ But this is the essence of a sacred space, for Sarpi: it is instituted by the state according to the principles of justice, which are themselves divinely inspired.

One finds a similar interest in the relationship between the sacred and the civic in John Selden's own commentary on asylum, written a year after Sarpi's in his notes on the *Marmora Arundelliana* (1628). In his commentary on some of the marble inscriptions in this

²⁶⁴ Plutarch, "Life of Theseus," in *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes Compared Together*, trans. Thomas North (London, 1579), 19; see Sarpi, *De Iure Asylorum*, 188–89.

collection, Selden discusses concepts of asylum and sacred space among the Hellenistic peoples who made the inscription.²⁶⁵ He remarks first that the inscriptions expand the notion of what could be considered an “asylum” to an entire city: “ex urbe nemo qui vicinis damnum injuriamve intulerat, in deditionem repetendus” (2:1530) (no one who was bringing in crime or injury from neighboring places could be reclaimed from the city as a right of possession). Selden also notes an even more expansive sense of asylum, by which ancient writers—Selden cites Proclus in particular—could refer to the British islands themselves as sacred places of asylum (ibid.).²⁶⁶ For Selden, the notion of asylum is especially flexible, because it seems to contain a concept that is common to many different religions. Among pagans, groves and temples could be asylums, and the temple at Mecca was an asylum in the Koran (2:1530–31). “Sed christianorum in universum omnia, post adultum fere christianismum, templa confugis salutem praestabant: Et majestatis crimen erat eos abducere, etiam verberibus, tonsura, & deportatione luendum” (2:1531) (But in general all the temples of the Christians, after Christianity became established more broadly, offered safety to refugees; and it was treason to abduct them, punishable even by whipping, tonsure, and exile). Moreover, and as Sarpi also indicated in his work, the concept of asylum is one in which the sacred and the civic converge in the commentary tradition. Selden points to the richness of the topic, “juris tum civilis tum sacri utriusque imperii commentarios, & varios singularium gentium mores, quibus & firmatum saepius est & mutatum asylorum in ecclesiis jus” (ibid.) (the commentaries on both civil and sacred law and on the authority of each, as well as the various habits of many peoples, by which the law of asylum has frequently been

²⁶⁵ For the background and context of this work, see my “Legal Theories and Ancient Practices in John Selden’s *Marmora Arundelliana*,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 72 (2011): 393–412.

²⁶⁶ See Proclus, *The Commentaries of Proclus on the Timaeus of Plato*, ed. and trans. Thomas Taylor, 2 vols. (London, 1820), 1:94.

confirmed and changed in their churches). This is the crux of the notion of asylum, for Selden, namely that it can instantiate and unite concepts of sacred and civil authority in the mutual negotiations between them.

To illustrate this expansive sense of asylum, he offers his readers a manuscript account of a fifteenth-century English legal case involving the right of asylum. After citing Sarpi's "liber singularis" on asylum, Selden writes:

Nec vero omnino ingratum forsán fuerit si de singulari asyloꝝ jure, quo etiam in universis suis aedibus gaudebat olim tam Templariorum, dum steteré, sodalitiũ, quam Hospitalariorum, decisionem Anglicanam, eamque non contemnendam, ex vetusto rerum Hospitalariorum codice MS. hic obiter adjecero. (ibid.)

[It would not be altogether unwished, perhaps, if I discussed here an English legal decision, not inconsiderable in itself, and drawn from an old codex of things relating to the order of the Hospitallers, concerning that very singular right of asylum, which the society of Templars, and of Hospitallers, once enjoyed in all of their temples, while they stood.]

The case that Selden then transcribes concerns John Gore, who, after having committed a felony, fled to "Spittlehouse," a sanctuary owned by the Order of Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem.²⁶⁷ The details of the case are vague, but it suffices to say that Gore was taken out of their temple by force and then demanded his right of restitution. A jury of twelve was called, which in turn granted Gore the restitution, but the two judges in the case doubted whether this was actually legal. The case was adjourned until the next summer, when the matter was referred to royal agents so that they could decide whether the privilege of asylum applied to Gore's case. The royal overseers agreed with the jury, and the case was settled in Gore's favor. Selden seems pleased with the elegance of the case, and the way in which the matter of asylum, an idea applied to broadly and generally among all the great peoples of the

²⁶⁷ For the provenance of the manuscript containing this story, see G. J. Toomer, *John Selden: A Life in Scholarship*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009), 1:377.

world, found a manifestation in the legal processes of the island that Proclus himself had termed an asylum. The end of his note contains a hint of regret: “Sed sub Henrico Angliae rege VIII, legibus in ordinum comitiis latis antiquata sunt huiusmodi asylorum jura; & plane apud nos evanuerunt” (2:1533) (But under King Henry VIII, laws were made in the Parliament that rejected laws of this kind concerning asylums; and clearly among us such laws have totally vanished). Henry tore down the buildings of the Hospitallers, and of course in 1623 all right of sanctuary was abolished. Even from the case that Selden cites it is evident that the right of asylum ultimately depended on state authority, but, for Selden, the most interesting thing about asylum was clearly the way that arguments about sacred places touched on issues important to both civil and sacred powers.

It is clear that both Sarpi and Selden saw in asylum a proving ground for the interaction of religious and civil communities in the early modern world. Neither author would subjugate the church to the state; rather, they would have the legal processes of that state be informed by the long history of religious traditions and practices not just of the people in the state but of many peoples, Christian and non-Christian. For Sarpi and Selden, the relevance of pagan culture to this debate about asylum was not its importation of arguments from natural reason but rather the ways in which that culture found ways to manage numinous commands for the sanctity of holy places with the legal imperatives to punish crime and maintain order in the state. Pagan religious practices are being judged with an eye to their effectiveness and function, along with their universal validity. And yet both are concerned with how these practices define particular nations, peoples, and religious communities. Selden’s note, especially, prompts us to ask what it means to see the nation itself as a sacred place, a place of asylum. By adducing the very particular case of John Gore

Selden implicitly links the numinous sense of Britain as a place of refuge with the changing legal formulas that instantiate the numinous within the nominal letter of the law. That an entire nation could be a place of refuge and protection would continue to be a powerful imaginative force in early modern Europe, and a troubled one.

Of course, Selden had the luxury of writing for a highly educated, thoughtful international audience; other constructions of sacred places partook of coarser associations with pagan religions in polemical discourse.²⁶⁸ And indeed, the very concept of sacred space came under intense scrutiny throughout the 1620s and '30s. For the French minister Francis de Croy, the Catholic Church is in conformity with "Gentilisme" in the matter of asylums:

your Churches receiue in differently all manner of transgressors, and this priuiledge of Sanctuarie, hath beene graunted also to Bishops houses, though they were not contiguous with the Churches. And from whence haue you learned this manner of doing but from Gentilisme? The *Athenians* had an *Asylum*, whose priuiledges were excessiue. *Romulus* did before that time open the same vnto all manner of fellons, to the end that his bloudie citie might be the better inhabited. The Emperours statues had this priuiledge, and we should neuer haue done, if we would set downe the seuerall places of Refuge for all sort of crimes, whereof the vse was great among the Gentiles.²⁶⁹

De Croy imputes to Catholicism the same multiplicity of sacred sites that he decries in paganism. To this multiplicity he links the proliferation of privileges that sacred places supposedly license. In fact, many polemicists argued along the same lines, that the very concept that one place might contain more holiness than another could then give rise to abuses of those places by those seeking absolution from their crimes. The same worry

²⁶⁸ Protestant scholarship, however, also supported the idea that modern notions of asylum were derived from pagans and ultimately lent themselves readily to abuses. See, for example, Rudolphus Hospinianus, *De Templis: Hoc est, De Origine, Progressu, Usu et Abusu Templorum*, 2nd ed. (Zurich, 1603), 81–82.

²⁶⁹ De Croy, *The Three Conformities: or the Harmony and Agreement of the Romish Church with Gentilisme, Iudaisme and Auncient Heresies*, trans. William Hart (London, 1620), 52.

extended, albeit more abstractly, to altars, that to bind divinity to one place or many would be to grant authority over the divine to human agents.

Paganism thus played a central role in constructing debates about the placement and function of altars in the 1630s. Shortly after the accession of Charles I in 1625 and the ascendancy of William Laud as dean of the royal chapel in 1626, altar policy began to change. Canon 82 of 1604 had allowed that the communion table could be placed in any convenient position for the ministers and parishioners. According to Julian Davies, “Parishioners, left to interpret the most convenient position, placed and used their tables as they wished. For those who saw the table as the focus of order or greatest residence of God on earth this was an intolerable state of disorientation.”²⁷⁰ Indeed, in the words of Laud himself the altar is “the greatest place of God’s residence upon earth.”²⁷¹ Accordingly, some ministers inclining to this position changed the communion table from its east-west orientation to a north-south, or “altarwise,” orientation and placed it in the east end of the church. The public controversy played out during 1636–37, with treatises from John Williams and Peter Heylyn, among others. Historians have argued over the reception of Caroline altar policy, and it appears that there was a significant range of opinion, participation, and discussion among ministers, the people, and civil authorities alike; some supported the policy and indeed moved the altars on their own accord, while others actively fought against the policy.²⁷² In terms of the intellectual origins of the conflict, Kenneth

²⁷⁰ Davies, *The Caroline Captivity of the Church: Charles I and the Remoulding of Anglicanism, 1625–1641* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 207.

²⁷¹ Qtd. in Kenneth Fincham and Nicholas Tyacke, *Altars Restored: The Changing Face of English Religious Worship, 1547–c.1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 148.

²⁷² See especially Kevin Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 335–45; Davies, *Caroline Captivity of the Church*, 205–50; and, for the fullest account yet written, Fincham and Tyacke, *Altars Restored*, 126–226.

Fincham and Nicholas Tyacke have related the controversy to the ongoing debates about the nature of idolatry and its relationship to the polemical battle over the influence of Catholicism in the English church.²⁷³ This controversy, however, was also one in which conceptions of paganism and sacred places in the early church played crucial roles.

It became, too, a polemical struggle that served to concretize some tenets of what is now known as Laudianism. In his essay defining the doctrines that made up Laud's view of the world, Peter Lake argues that Laud's and his sympathizers' attitudes toward sacred space were part of the archbishop's efforts to redraw "the division between the sacred and the profane in tight spatial and temporal terms."²⁷⁴ The Laudians wanted to reclaim the boundaries of the sacred from "puritans," who "allowed the sacred or the holy to spill out of the church and into the world."²⁷⁵ This reclamation would reinvest the sacred with strong institutional authority and actually expand its power by making it a structuring force for communal, social, and religious life. The two perspectives Lake presents are certainly not unique to this decade, as we have seen. Early modern Christians were constantly shifting from a model of the sacred that saw its diffusion in the world as a representing the constant struggle against omnipresent evil, and a model that placed the sacred within the bonds of the institutional church as an authority that obviated the need for its continual conflict with the profane. It comes as no surprise that much of the published polemic constituting the altar controversy in print took up the question of pagan notions of sacred space and their influence on Christians views of the same. The issue boiled down to whether the divine presence could

²⁷³ See Fincham and Tyacke, *Altars Restored*, 127–31 and 148–51.

²⁷⁴ Lake, "The Laudian Style: Order, Uniformity and the Pursuit of the Beauty of Holiness in the 1630s," in *The Early Stuart Church, 1603–1642*, ed. Kenneth Fincham (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 178.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 179.

be said to favor one place over another or if, as some argued, that presence lent all places an equal claim to be sacred—and, thus, all places mixed the sacred and profane.²⁷⁶

In 1637 John Williams introduced the multitude of authors who have discussed the altar by citing Walafrid Strabo, a ninth-century German monk. Strabo says that “Christians in the beginning did place their *Altars indifferently, in diversas plagas*, East, West, North, and South; and gives a reason for it not to be easily refuted; *Quia non est locus, ubi non est Deus*. God is as well the God of the West, North, and South, as he is of the East: and it is *Paganish* (as *Minutius Felix* well observes) to make him more propitious in any one Corner of the world, then he is in another.”²⁷⁷ Here was the issue in a nutshell, expressed rather succinctly. Could the divine numen be said to confer special distinction on one place rather than no one place in particular? This was not merely a theological question, or at least not in the same way as the question of transubstantiation and the real presence was. Williams goes on to argue simply that altars, or tables, should be placed indifferently rather than only at the eastern end of the church. The question for him was not if or how a specific object or rite summoned the divine, but rather how the human manipulation of the physical world for the purposes of social, religious, and even political existence could be linked to the divine. Indeed, the debate about altars joined other discourses in this period that were expanding conceptions of what could properly be called religious discipline, and doing it explicitly through historical arguments about the relationship between Christians and non-Christians.

²⁷⁶ On the complex of arguments surrounding the “programme of resacralization” of the land in the 1630s, see especially Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 252–73, qtn. on 266; and Andrew Spicer, “‘What kinde of house a kirk is’: Conventicles, Consecrations and the Concept of Sacred Space in post-Reformation Scotland,” in *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Will Coster and Spicer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 81–103.

²⁷⁷ Williams, *The Holy Table, Name & Thing more Anciently, Properly, and Literally Used Under the New Testament, then that of Altar* (London, 1637), 219; for Strabo’s source, see Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. Migne, vol. 3, col. 341A (chap. 32).

Peter Heylyn's reply to Williams argues against Strabo's notion that to place an altar in a particular place is paganism; rather, Heylyn argues that the "natural law" itself has enjoined different peoples throughout history, and without access to scripture, to set up altars. Heylyn thus wants to reframe the discussion in terms of a competing notion of how pagan practices, and Jewish, might relate to Christian practices. Of those people even before Moses, "The light of nature could informe them that there was a God, had not their Parents, from the first man *Adam*, beene carefull to instruct them in that part of knowledge: and the same light of nature did informe them also, that God was to bee worshipped by them; that there were some particular services expected of him from his Creature."²⁷⁸ But of course, since the light of nature urges these practices, it also urged the pagans into practices which, formally at least, are similar to those enjoined by the Christian God:

The severall gods in *Rome*, the *Temples* unto them belonging, the *Altars* in those *Temples*, and Colledges of *Priests* attending on those *Altars*, are things so generally knowne; that it were losse of time to insist upon them. The like may also be observed in all other places, and of all *Idols* whatsoever. For whatsoever the *Idol* represented, and by whomsoever it was worshipped, if it were once set up and honoured as a Deitie, it drew along with it all those necessary attendants, which were by God himselfe thought fit to wait upon the true religion. The *Groves and high places*, the *Priests and Altars* destined to the service of that foule *Idol Baal*, mentioned in the holy Scriptures, were prooffe enough of this, were there no prooffe else. (section 2, p. 5)

For Heylyn, that such congruity might exist is not surprising, since Christians have merely modified the practices of Jew and Gentile alike. His argument is that the modification of content and even form must not, therefore, depart from the practices commanded by the "light of nature." And thus Christians must have altars, and their placement matters.

Heylyn reminds us that this argument ultimately derives from Hooker, who also assumed that religious practices could be justified or rejected according to natural law

²⁷⁸ Heylyn, *Antidotum Lincolnense, or an Answer to a Book Entitled, The Holy Table* (London, 1637), section 2, p. 2.

applicable to all peoples everywhere. He paraphrases “our incomparable Hooker” later in his comments on the early patriarchs: “Nature informed them in the *maine*, that proper and peculiar places were to be set apart to Gods publick worship, and God himself informed them in the *circumstance* thereof, for the forme and fashion, both when the Church was moveable and when after settled. The *Tabernacle* fashioned by his direction, was a moveable *Temple*; the *Temple* fashioned by that patterne, was a settled Tabernacle” (section 2, p. 69). Again, this is justified by the public service that God demands. The argument for setting aside particular places for worship is that natural law, which commands “peculiar” worship, interacts with divine commands that then specify how circumstantial necessities are to be integrated with the dictates of natural law. Part of the force of this argument comes from Heylyn’s notion that the practical dimensions of religious worship are, like the Temple and Tabernacle in the wilderness, “moveable.” But, and perhaps counter-intuitively, this mobility argues against identifying the veneration of certain spaces as pagan. Indeed, Heylyn responds to Williams’ citation of Wilifrid Strabo by arguing that devotional mobility—the indifference of altar placement—among the early Christians only obtained for a short time (section 2, p. 84). As Christianity attained civil relevance, its adherents found it appropriate to differentiate particular places in their worship.

Heylyn’s arguments partake of Hookerian notions of the relationship between natural law and religious rites; however, Hooker’s ideas of universal application of religious impulses to worship need to be compared and contrasted with more specifically scholarly, antiquarian constructions of ancient religious rituals and their continuing relevance. As Jonathan Sheehan has argued, while Hooker would justify rituals by the light of nature, antiquarian scholars such as Selden found that “rites were functional, not natural practices.

Rites were precisely the dimensions of religion constitutive of political and social communities.”²⁷⁹ For another scholar of early modern concepts of idolatry, what we are witnessing in this period is the confrontation of two competing notions of the development of pagan idolatry within Christian culture. He argues that we can see here “The uneasy coexistence of a concept of civilization based on classical ideas of the growth of the polis on the naturalistic basis of utility and necessity, and the Christian emphasis on idolatrous degeneration from a primitive monotheism.”²⁸⁰ Heylyn seems to be privileging both: that gentiles imitate the Jews, and yet that both groups are guided by universal principles of religious worship. Indeed, religious discipline was the sticking point, because the refinement of practice was undeniably the effect of a process of civilization and socialization, which was difficult to pin on the refinement of doctrine.

Moreover, in the religious culture of seventeenth-century England, these narratives of the development of paganism found concrete expression in debates about the value of tradition itself, especially in the writings of the fathers and within the world of the early church. As Jean-Louis Quantin’s extensive treatment of this question has revealed, the very notion of appealing to the written authority of the representatives of the institutionalized church in the several centuries after Christ’s death was fraught with problems. To accept the governing force of “traditions” was, implicitly, to seek the truth outside of scripture in the human interpretations of God’s laws. Antiquity itself was made into a polemical chip to be deployed or decried. For a scholar such as Isaac Casaubon, to appeal to tradition alongside scripture was to acknowledge that religious culture must take a middle course between divine

²⁷⁹ Sheehan, “The Altars of the Idols: Religion, Sacrifice, and the Early Modern Polity,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67 (2006): 669.

²⁸⁰ Joan-Pau Rubiés, “Theology, Ethnography, and the Historicization of Idolatry,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67 (2006): 585.

revelation and human interpretation.²⁸¹ Laudians of the 1630s, and Heylyn chief among them, took up this notion as a core principle and applied it to religious controversies. “They were,” Quantin argues, “wont to plead for ecclesiastical traditions as ultimately derived from the Apostles by uninterrupted succession.”²⁸² But “antiquity” was not limited to Christian antiquity merely, as Heylyn’s extensive treatment of pre-Christian religious practices demonstrates; classical and biblical polytheism could also provide grounding rationales for defenses of ceremonies in the English church. For Laudian divines, the consensus of unwritten traditions and practices, even outside of the church or Christianity itself, formed a legitimate area of discussion because, in their opinion, they were arguing in the realm of the “light of nature.” As Andrewes had argued, the common law provided a model for religious polity: just as the country was governed by long-standing traditions, so too could the church, as a governing body, form itself according to actions outside of God’s specific dispensations and commands. The problem of sacred space tested this idea, though; it forced its defenders to argue that a certain place was sacred by virtue of God’s special, differentiated presence, while at the same time arguing that pagan practices that reflected this sense of divine enclosure also demonstrated the eternally valid principles informing this practice.

Thus, the status of sacred places was important for defining the valences of religious discipline: the alternate mobility and fixity of sacred spaces seemed increasingly to reveal the often complicated interaction of religious ideology with social circumstance and necessity. This complexity defines Joseph Mede’s extensive interventions in the cultural and religious debates about sacred space in the 1630s. Mede was professor of Greek at Cambridge in the

²⁸¹ See Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity: The Construction of a Confessional Identity in the 17th Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 142–54.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 199; see also pp. 155–202.

1620s and '30s, which meant that his purview was primarily the world of the New Testament and early church. And indeed, he was extraordinarily well read in the texts that defined the intellectual scope of that world. Though he is known to modern scholarship mainly through his eschatological thought and thus his influence on a wide range of radical, millenarian ideology, Mede himself was an ecclesiastical moderate.²⁸³ It may come as a surprise, as it did even to some of his contemporaries, that he fully supported the idea that some spaces and places must be set aside as sacred and given due devotion. He tirelessly argued for this point during the last years of his life and even in the works published after his untimely death in 1638.

William Twisse was one of many Puritan admirers of Mede who was nonetheless surprised that Mede held such views of sacred places. Twisse oversaw the posthumous publication of Mede's *The Apostasy of the Latter Times* in 1641, wherein he wondered that Mede could have stood with Laud on this issue. In his preface, Twisse responds to what he sees as both Hooker's and Mede's essential argument, that "*Eadem est ratio loci & temporis*, There is the same reason of time and place." "For where it doth hold," Twisse argues instead, "it holds only in relation to time, and place, naturall. And indeed, time is only naturall; but place may be artificial, and such is a Temple."²⁸⁴ As Twisse sees it, the duty to build places of worship was emphatically not a moral duty; furthermore, it would be impossible to keep a proportion of space, though it is certainly possible to keep a proportion of time. The reason is that God's creation proceeded in natural time, and so worshipping him on certain days is permissible; but to build a structure proportional to him would require more than man's

²⁸³ See Sarah Hutton, "Mede, Milton, and More: Christ's College millenarians," in *Milton and the Ends of Time*, ed. Juliet Cummins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 32 and notes 5–6.

²⁸⁴ Mede, *The Apostasy of the Latter Times* (London, 1641), "The Preface to the Reader," sig. [A4v].

ability. And in fact it is important to note the ways in which the *Apostasy of Latter Times* does revise Mede's earlier advocacy of the sanctity of place, expressed in works published at the end of the 1630s.

In these earlier works, Mede justifies altars and other sacred places through arguments not from the light of nature, as Heylyn and Hooker had done, but through historical arguments from the importance of decorum and order as manifested in religious practice. He entered the debate in 1637 with his *The Name Altar, or Θυσιαστήριον, Anciently Given to the Holy Table*; he clearly intended his treatise on Christian altars to be an authoritative survey of all extant writings on the subject from the early years of the church. His goal is two-fold: to argue that the early church did have altars and that these altars were different, in kind and purpose, from the altars of pagan idols. Pagan authors such as Celsus had impugned Christians because they had no temples, and this assertion gave ammunition to those Protestants arguing that the early Christians did not have altars or particular sacred spaces. Mede responds, however, that "as for Temples, their meaning was, they had no such *claustra Numinum* as the Gentiles supposed *Temples* to be, and to which they appropriated that name; viz. Places, whereunto the gods, the power of spels and magical consecrations, were confined and limited."²⁸⁵ But, he makes clear, the early Christians did have altars and that these altars were sacred places differentiated from others. "For in times past," he argues, "(when men perhaps were as wise as we are now) it was thought fit and decent, that things set apart unto God, and sacred, should be distinguished not only in use, but in name also from things common. For what is a *Temple* or *Church* but a *House*? yet distinguished in name

²⁸⁵ Mede, *The Works of the Pious and Profoundly-Learned Joseph Mede, B.D., Sometimes Fellow of Christ's Colledge in Cambridge*, ed. John Worthington (London, 1672), 392. I will cite Mede's works from this edition by page in the text. In this edition, Worthington provides translations for all the non-English quotations in the original editions.

from other Houses” (389). The nature of the practice is thus one of the main components of the sacred itself. It is the use of Christians themselves, not the habitation of pagan gods, that gives significance to Christian places. Mede’s distinction between Christian and pagan sacred places seems, actually, to be fairly weak; in practice, the two religions approach the construction and worship of sacred places in similar ways. It is only doctrine that separates them.

By the 1630s, Mede had been thinking through the problems of arguing about sacred places for many years. Indeed, his first theological tract was on this very topic, *De Sanctitate Relativa*, which he presented to Lancelot Andrewes and which moved Andrewes to offer Mede the position of his household chaplain (which Mede refused). This was probably around the year 1610, and Mede revised his treatise for a sermon to the clergy, *Concio ad Clerum*, which he preached in 1618 (as Worthington notes, p. xxx). In the *Concio*, Mede says that he is trying to avoid the extremes toward which arguments about sacred space are prone to drift: some bring in “*Venerationis praetextu Idolatriam*” (398) (idolatry under the pretext of veneration), while others react to this by introducing “*Contemptum . . . omnis rei Sacrae*” (contempt of all things sacred).²⁸⁶ Mede solves the problem by carefully defining the essence of what he calls “relative” sanctity: “*Hanc autem definio Peculiaritatem rei versùs Deum à certo Praesentiae ipsius aut Dominii modo*” (399) (I define this as the peculiarity of a thing involving God by a fixed measure either of his presence or ownership). By this he means that places are made sacred from being set apart from others, either by means of God’s presence in that place or by virtue of a place being subject to ecclesiastical laws of ownership.

It is with this distinction that Mede is particularly interested in refuting the argument, which he imputes to his opponents, that “*Omnia Loca esse hodie aequè sancta*” (400) (all

²⁸⁶ My translation; Worthington did not provide a translation for this treatise.

places today are equally sacred). Of course, for Mede the very notion of worshipping divinity loses its meaning if all places and times are made “fas et liberum” (ibid.) (free and available). The point of worship is practice, and practice demands a division of places and things into the sacred and non-sacred. But this very division then licenses the careful consideration of church policy to best suit the needs of the people. As Mede concludes one section of his *Concio*, “Non ego tamen hanc vel illam Externae venerationis formam urgeo, sed Externam tantum urgeo quacunque formâ, modesta modò sit, & Gentis cujusque moribus accommodata, & rebus Christianis decora” (405) (I do not recommend this or that particular form of external worship, but I do recommend external worship in some form, if it is modest, and if it is adapted to the habits of a given people and it is appropriate for Christian matters). The idea that we can talk about God’s presence in terms of “peculiarity” provides the rationale for Mede’s careful consideration of the importance of external worship. But this peculiarity is also his way of responding to the argument that veneration of places is somehow pagan because it localizes the deity and divides his essence. For Mede, though, sanctity itself can be relative to the mysterious workings of God and his actions in the human realm: he reveals his presence at some times rather than others and dispenses laws and distributes goods to some people rather than others. All this necessitates the dual human responses of decorous worship and carefully considered ecclesiastical policies, responses that can be observed throughout all religious societies.

Mede developed these ideas even further in his longer treatise on churches published in 1638, *Churches, that is, Appropriate Places for Christian Worship*. His argument there turns on the interpretation of specific ritual prescriptions and their relationship to moral duties enjoined by God. As an example, he cites “that Divine admonition given first to

Moses, and afterward to *Iosua*, *Put they shoes from off thy feet*, &c. in that Law, *Reverence my Sanctuary*; in this Instruction by *Solomon*, *Look to thy feet when thou comest to the House of God*” (350). In fact, argues Mede, neglect of these prohibitions “is condemned of Phophaneness by the practice of *Iews*, *Gentiles*, *Pagans*, *Mahumetans*, all Religions whatsoever: if any to be excepted (*proh pudor & dolor!*) it is our selves.” This is not an argument from the light of nature; rather, Mede is saying that the very notion of holding particular rites sacred stems from the fact that God himself produces “peculiar” relations to his worshippers. Certain places thus “ought to be used with a different respect from things common: and God’s House (as you have heard) hath something singular from the rest.” Mede premises this argument on the simple concept of decency: it is good to make some sign of respect when we enter someone’s house. But Mede does not prescribe the rituals to be used in the church; “that belongs to the discretion of our Superiours and the authority of the Church to appoint, not to me to determine” (ibid.). Mede’s theoretical thrust is to associate man’s natural moral duty with the necessity to understand the specific duties enjoined by God in his revelation; these revealed duties are not necessarily moral, but they are certainly coterminous with morality. To bow when one enters the church is not really a moral duty from the perspective of the natural law; but God’s laws, filtered through human authority, interact with the natural law to create obligation.

This fuzzy way of describing the interaction between divine decree and moral duty perhaps conditions the historical examples toward which Mede gravitates in his other works on sacred space. In his posthumously published *Diatribae: Discourses on Diverse Texts of Scripture* (1642), he becomes particularly interested in the multiplicity of sacred spaces among the ancients, and especially among the Jews. In discourse eighteen, he addresses the

apparent contradiction arising when Joshua places a stone under the oak that was “by the sanctuary of the Lord” (Joshua 24:26). How could there be a sanctuary of the Lord in Sichem, where Joshua set the stone, when the ark and tabernacle were still in Shiloh? Mede thinks this place was a “*proseucha*,” or a place of prayer that was surrounded by trees and open to the air, like a court (66). He relies on the account of Epiphanius in his *Panarion*, wherein he compares these *proseuchae* among the Messalians to the *fora* of the Gentiles.²⁸⁷ At the end of his long discourse, Mede reaches some significant conclusions about the nature of sacred places. First of all, he argues, in the Old Testament the Jews were able to make places of worship almost *ad libitum*; their devotion did not depend on the actual presence of the ark but rather was constructed by the particulars of their practice. More importantly for Christians, he argues, “we may learn from hence, That to have appropriate places set apart for *Prayer* and *Divine duties*, is not a Circumstance or Rite proper to *Legal* worship only, but of a more common nature” (69). The idea that religious rituals modify what was previously “common” and make it distinct through a process of discrimination formed the lynchpin of Mede’s justification of the sanctity of place. As he concludes:

Yea, when the Tabernacle and Temple were, the *Altar* of God stood still in an *open Court*; and who can believe that the place of those *Altars* of the Patriarchs was not bounded and separated from common ground? And from these patterns in likelihood, after the *Altar for Sacrifice* was restrained to *one only place*, was continued still the use of such *open places or Courts for Prayer*, garnished with Trees, as I have shewed *Proseucha's* to have been. (ibid.)

And the reason that “common ground” can be “bounded and separated” is that God’s revelation demands the particular responses necessitated by “Circumstance.” Indeed, the relationship between the universal moral duty to worship and the particular circumstances of

²⁸⁷ See Epiphanius, *The Panarion of St. Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis*, trans. Philip R. Amidon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 355–56.

that worship provides argument enough, for Mede, for the idea that maintaining the form and beauty of sacred places constitutes a religious obligation in itself.

But the implications of this argument, and its universal application among Christians and non-Christians alike, were genuinely problematic for Mede. Just as pagan temples were similar to Christians in the abstract concept they instantiated—the binding of devotion—so too the very idea of sacred place seemed very similar to the idea of demonic protection invoked by Old Testament pagans and later, classical pagans as well. Mede’s primary purpose in the *Apostasy of the Latter Times* is to argue for the proper meaning of the “doctrine of demons” that will supposedly creep into the church in the latter days. For Mede, this doctrine is not that which is made up by demons, but rather the doctrine that flows from the recognition of the power of demons themselves. Mede’s distinction represents a contribution to the culture-wide efforts to explain sources of demon worship with a view to historical origins, and thus to locate the problems of the church within historical circumstances.²⁸⁸ Thus, Mede identifies this impulse in the worship of the saints in the early church and the proximity of this worship to pagan ancestor worship. The historical moment of the expulsion of the pagan gods forms the temporal pivot at which pagan demons became Christian objects of devotion. He quotes Theodoret, a historian writing during the Theodosian dynasty, to show him arguing for the similarities between pagan demons and Christian martyrs. In Theodoret’s *De Curandis Graecorum Affectionibus* (On Cures for the Maladies of the Greeks), he concludes that “Our Lord God hath brought his Dead (*viz. the Martyrs*) into the room and place (*the Temples*) of your Gods, whom he hath sent packing,

²⁸⁸ On the application of historical perspective to arguments about demon worship and apocalypse, see Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 315–20 and 333–45. Clark links this impetus to historicize to a related impetus to demystify and discredit “a wide range of cultural forms as ‘superstitions’” (530).

and hath given their honour to his Martyrs. For in stead of the Feasts of *Iupiter* and *Bacchus* are now celebrated the Festivals of *Peter* and *Paul*” (642).²⁸⁹ “Demons” have simply changed their guise from gods to martyrs, but they retain their essential nature as protecting spirits invoked to guard people in the present both from social ills and divine wrath.

The problem thus extended far beyond the actual question of pagan demons and practices infiltrating the church; rather, the problem might be posed in terms of the very concepts of protection and guardianship provided by religious institutions. Laud himself characterized external forms of religious ceremony as the “*Hedge* that fence the *Substance of Religion* from all the Indignities, which *Prophanenesse* and *Sacriledge* too Commonly put upon it.”²⁹⁰ Mede was troubled by this association of worship and devotion with the idea of a protective boundary. He viewed this problem through a millenarian framework; he was justly well known for his scholarship on Old Testament prophecy, and especially his decoding of obscure passages in Daniel. One of his longest notes in the *Apostasy of the Latter Times* purports to explain the significance of chapter 11 of the book of Daniel, wherein the prophet predicts that, in the last days of the Roman empire, the people will fall to worshipping *Mahuzzim*. As Mede argues, *Mahuzzim* “are *Protectores Dii* (such as *Saints* and *Angels* are supposed to be)” (669). He defines the root, “*Mahoz*, which in the abstract signifies sometimes *Strength*, sometimes a *Fortress* or *Bulwark*. . . . But the Hebrews use Abstracts for Concretes.” Thus, Mede argues, the *Mahuzzim* really signify something that “strengthens or fortifies, that is a Protector, Defender, Guardian, Helper” (670). Mede continues on to the

²⁸⁹ The translation is by Worthington, who quotes the original in the margin. For the Greek, see Theodoretus of Cyrus, *Graecarum Affectionum Curatio*, in *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne, vol. 83 (Paris, 1864), col. 1033.

²⁹⁰ Laud, *A Relation of the Conference Betweene William Lawd, then, Lrd. Bishop of St. Davids; now, Lord Arch-Bishop of Canterbury: and Mr. Fisher the Jesuite by the Command of King James of Ever Blessed Memorie* (London, 1639), sig. *3v; for discussion of this passage, see Reid Barbour, *Literature and Religious Culture in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 32.

real problem with this definition: “Will not then the *valiant Martyrs* and Champions of the Faith well bear the name of *Mahuzzims*?” Additionally, “The True God is called a *Rock*; *Baalim* and False Gods are also *Rocks*: The True God, or Christ himself, is often by *David* call’d *Mahoz*; why may not then False Gods, or Plurality of Christs, be called *Mahuzzim*? *Rock* and *Fortress* are not words of so great difference” (ibid.). Mede answers this question by arguing that Daniel’s words refer to the introduction of saint worship into the early church. Many of the early fathers, Mede notes, linked the martyr cults to the idea that, by scattering the relics of the saints, God set up national and religious boundaries, assigning each province or district a kind of protector. He quotes St. Chrysostom on the importance of such protection:

Those Saints bodies (saith he) Τειγίζει, Fortify our City more strongly than an Impregnable Wall of Adamant; and as certain high Rocks hanging on every side, repel not only the assaults of those Enemies which are sensible and seen with the eye, but also overthrow and defeat the ambuscades of Invisible Fiends, and all the Stratagems of the Devil. Here you see are *Mahuzzims* too. (673)

Of course, for Mede the *Mahuzzim* signify the undue reliance on guardians and, indeed, particular spaces as totemic representations of God’s special protection. But, at the same time, Mede also defended the idea that Christians should respect God’s sacred places and even appoint specific rituals to demonstrate that respect. This anxiety reflects not only Mede’s ambivalence in the face of cultural change, but also the very real ambivalence of many toward the implications of setting aside places as sacred.

III. Milton, the *Genius Loci*, and the Boundaries of Nation and Church

The problem of defining sacred space that arose during the altar controversy was thus also a much larger issue, encompassing ideas of nationhood and the boundaries and limitations of

the church and even of the nation. As Mede indicated, guardian spirits could be assigned to entire nations, not just a particular mountain or valley. This very pagan idea was perhaps not so pagan; after all, the notion of a *genius loci*, or spirit of a place, was not very different from the guardian angels that many different cultures invoked. As Selden himself noted in his commentary on Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* (1612), "anciently both *Iewes, Gentiles, & Christians* haue supposed to euery Countrey a singular *Genius*."²⁹¹ Milton, too, recognizes the importance of this concept in his early poetic efforts. In his Nativity Ode he portrayed a "parting genius" (186), ejected from its local seat where it was enshrined in a thicket and enmeshed with flowers. This, however, was merely the first of many geniuses that inhabit Milton's early poetry. As Joad Raymond has argued extensively, Milton was intensely concerned with the nationalist implications of a presiding spirit force, which could assert "an association between the people and the land that is above and beyond worldly politics." Moreover, it could privilege a kind of belonging "that links landscape, community, neighbourliness, religion, and, through the notion of protection, well-being."²⁹² As I will argue in this concluding section, Milton's relationship to this idea of a protected nation changes throughout his early career; charting his engagement with debates over sacred space and pagan religions provides an index of such change. Milton's early poetry creates worlds filled with spirits, geniuses, attendants, and demons; and as Milton poetically transmutes the larger cultural dialogue of sacred space, he is also constructing his complex later stances on paganism, idolatry, and religious purity.

²⁹¹ Drayton, *Poly-Olbion* (London, 1612), 13.

²⁹² Raymond, *Milton's Angels: The Early Modern Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 243–44; see also Philip M. Soergel, "Luther on the Angels," in *Angels in the Early Modern World*, ed. Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 64–82.

It is clear that the notion of a place-specific “genius” fascinated the young poet. His early poems display an ever expanding sense of the importance and implications of the “genius” trope. For example, Milton translates the “parting genius” of the Nativity Ode into his *Arcades*, the pastoral entertainment he wrote for the Countess Dowager of Derby in 1634. But here the “Genius of the Wood” that greets the shepherds is a “protective force” that also serves as a representative, at least partially, of “divine will.”²⁹³ As he states, “For know by lot from Jove I am the power / Of this fair wood” (44–45). His role is to protect the plants from harm, and to assist them in their growth, “And from the boughs brush off the evil dew, / And heal the harms of thwarting thunder blue” (50–51). Milton clearly knew the tradition of this figure, which in the classical world was often associated with birth and growth.²⁹⁴ This “Genius of the Wood,” however, also has a connection to the immutable realm of celestial harmony. After he is finished visiting “every sprout / With puissant words” (59–60), he listens to “the celestial sirens’ harmony” (63). The essential function of this genius is provide a connection between the two realms, being partly physical and partly spiritual. It is important in this respect that the genius derives his power from the “lot” he received from Jove. He has a connection to the higher orders of what he calls the “adamantine spindle round, / On which the fate of gods and men is wound” (66–67); and yet, in his “lot” he also instantiates a certain degree of chance and contingency that is manifested in the natural world. He is, in a sense, a mediatory figure, manifesting the Platonic notion that demons provide a medium for the transcendent forms to interact with the material world.

²⁹³ Mary Ann McGuire, “Milton’s ‘Arcades’ and the Entertainment Tradition,” *Studies in Philology* 75 (1978): 463–64.

²⁹⁴ For the background of this idea of “genius,” see D. T. Starnes, “The Figure Genius in the Renaissance,” *Studies in the Renaissance* 11 (1964): 234–44.

Thus the genius, with its connections to a vaguely non-Christian demonology, is a figure of uncertainty and instability, a representative both of the fixity and stability of place and of the fleeting numen that only occasionally touches on human things. In *Il Penseroso*, Milton's speaker is awoken to "sweet music" coming from "Above, about, or underneath, / Sent by some spirit to mortals good, / Or the unseen genius of the wood" (151–54). Many of the speaker's places of contemplation seem marked by what Mede called *claustra Numinum*, the enclosures of divinities. When night approaches, he asks the goddess to bring him

To arched walks of twilight groves,
And shadows brown that Sylvan loves
Of Pine, or monumental oak,
Where the rude axe with heaved stroke,
Was never heard the nymphs to daunt,
Or fright them from their hallowed haunt.
There in close covert by some brook,
Where no profaner eye may look,
Hide me from day's garish eye.

(133–41)

This speaker, like the Genius of the Wood in *Arcades*, finds some connections between the power of enclosed, natural spaces—the sacred grove or the "hallowed haunt"—and the music that seems to have no physical source. One might remember that the adjective "profane" derives from "pro- fanum," literally "before the temple," a recognition that this hallowed space is a kind of natural temple. And it seems to be this very "close covert" that generates a kind of poetic or musical power; indeed, at the end of the poem this speaker moves from the natural grove into the manmade cathedral with its own enclosures, the "studious cloister's pale" (156).

In fact, Milton subtly revises what many might assume to be the very essence of pagan religion in the Renaissance. Instead of seeing in the pagan deities emblems of change, he likes to imagine the sylvan gods and nymphs as inhabiting fixed positions in the natural

world.²⁹⁵ In his fifth elegy, on the coming of spring, Milton ends with the idea that the golden age would involve a kind of re-fixing of the natural deities in their proper places:

Dii quoque non dubitant caelo praeponere sylvas,
Et sua quisque sibi numina lucus habet.
Et sua quisque diu sibi numina lucus habeto,
Nec vos arborea dii precor ite domo.
Te referant miseris te Iupiter aurea terris
Sacula, quid ad nimbus aspera tela redis?
(131–36)

[The gods, too, unhesitatingly prefer these woods to their heavens, and each grove has its own particular deities. Long may each grove have its own particular deities: do not leave your homes among the trees, gods, I beseech you. May the golden age bring you back, Jove, to this wretched world! Why go back to your cruel weapons in the clouds?]²⁹⁶

This initially seems an odd thing to pray for. In a poem on seasonality, with its acknowledgement of the importance and beauty of natural change, to ask for stasis is slightly indecorous. But that is the poetic tension Milton hopes for; if the gods were to stay in their trees it would bring back the golden age, when divinity was perfectly aligned with metamorphic natural processes. It is suggestive that for Milton in his early Latin elegies poetic power comes from the easy association of divinity with specificity. His plea for divine permanence resembles the vatic moment of classical oracles, such as the Cumaean Sybil of the *Aeneid*: “deus ecce deus!” (a god is here, a god!), which provides the proper time to seek out oracles (poscere fata / tempus).²⁹⁷ According to Don Cameron Allen, the entire fifth elegy

²⁹⁵ For an influential definition of paganism as metamorphosis in the Renaissance, see Leonard Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis and the Pursuit of Paganism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), esp. 171–242.

²⁹⁶ Editors’ translation.

²⁹⁷ Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.45–46, in *P. Vergili Maronis Opera*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969); my translation.

is about the “ecstasy of poetic insight.”²⁹⁸ This inner sight is also a function of the indwelling of the god, a traditional notion to be sure, but here externalized into the enclosed groves and woods where inspiration differentiates the vatic poet.

The idea that religious inspiration could and should be externalized was fully consonant with the policies and programs of the established English church of Milton’s day. As Thomas N. Corns has argued persuasively, Milton, at least before the composition of *Lycidas* in 1637, had no real criticism to level at the Laudian church. Corns argues that Milton’s early poetry does not necessarily *support* Laud, but neither is it critical of the religious and social changes brought about the Laudian ascendancy. The cultural moment of Laudianism thus serves as the backdrop of Milton’s poetic development: the values of his early poetry are “the dominant values of its age; much of the Laudian agenda has been bought into (or at least provisionally subscribed to).”²⁹⁹ This argument is even more persuasive once we consider the legacy of pagan customs that I have been tracing throughout this chapter. Corns is responding to influential readings of Milton’s early works such as that by Barbara K. Lewalski, who labors to explain, among other things, Milton’s seemingly hagiographic treatment of Lancelot Andrewes in his third elegy. For Lewalski, the main purpose of this elegy is to lament the lost Protestant heroes of the Thirty Years War, not really to commemorate Andrewes’ passing.³⁰⁰ However, for Corns the choice of Andrewes indicates at least an implicit sympathy for the anti-Calvinist ministers who claimed Andrewes

²⁹⁸ *Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton*, vol. 1, ed. Douglas Bush (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 96.

²⁹⁹ Corns, “Milton before ‘Lycidas,’” in *Milton and the Terms of Liberty*, ed. Graham Parry and Joad Raymond (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002), 36.

³⁰⁰ Lewalski, “How Radical was the Young Milton?” in *Milton and Heresy*, ed. Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 52.

as their forebear.³⁰¹ Even more importantly, Corns reads the poem primarily in terms of Milton's fascination with the funeral elegy and the memorial rituals sanctioned by the church; as he notes, "Attitudes to burial rites constituted one of the more surprising touchstone issues which defined religious ideology in the early Stuart period."³⁰² In fact, Corns has more recently found in this idea one of the causes of Milton's gradual break with the Laudian church.

Along with Gordon Campbell, Corns has argued that it was the official reaction to the placement of the gravestone of Milton's mother that precipitated some dissatisfaction in the young poet toward the established church. It was John Williams, author of *The Holy Table*, who insisted on ecclesiastical inspections in 1637, while he himself was imprisoned in the Tower of London. Williams sent the archdeacon, who visited Horton in 1637 and noted the odd placement of Sara Milton's grave. As Campbell and Corns recount,

He noted approvingly Laudian details such as the kneeling bench by the rails, but was concerned that some of the seats were too high, including that of 'Mr Milton', and noted that the rector's surplice did not conform to requirements. He also noted that 'the two Tombstones in the Chancel in the pavement are laid the wrong way'; the two tombstones in the floor of the chancel include that of Sara Milton.³⁰³

This objection reflects the intrusive form often taken by insistence on the specificity of sacred places in the Laudian ecclesiastical system. As another scholar argues, this "document reveals the Laudian church's presence and intrusion into Milton's Horton years."³⁰⁴ Indeed, this event may have indicated to Milton some of the ideological and institutional tensions

³⁰¹ However, it is likely that Andrewes was less influential an advocate of Laudian "Arminianism" than Corns supposes; see Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity*, 158–59.

³⁰² Corns, "Milton before 'Lycidas,'" in *Terms of Liberty*, ed. Parry and Raymond, 32.

³⁰³ Campbell and Corns, *John Milton: Life, Work, and Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 96.

³⁰⁴ Edward Jones, "'Church-outed by the Prelats': Milton and the 1637 Inspection of the Horton Parish Church," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 102 (2003): 50.

within the official ecclesiology of the 1630s and thus contributed, as Campbell and Corns argue, “to the erosion of the younger Milton’s allegiance to the Caroline church, evident in his only major vernacular poem of the Horton period, ‘Lycidas.’”³⁰⁵

However, this one event must be seen as only one part of Milton’s gradual trend toward the positions he would take in his prose of the early 1640s. While we can see clearly that Milton was already thinking through his anti-clericalism in “Lycidas,” it is more difficult, but for that reason all the more necessary, to find his religious sympathies in the group of texts representing Milton’s masque for the Earl of Bridgewater. Corns claims that the “Maske” is Milton’s “most ambitious poem of the 1630s” and “his most sustained engagement with the theory, as well as the style, of anti-Calvinism.”³⁰⁶ This perhaps goes too far; I would argue more cautiously that the content of that anti-Calvinism, where it appears, shows Milton in a transitional moment in his religious and cultural affiliations, which are partially filtered through the complex representation of sacred objects, rituals, and places in the masque. In fact, in the importance attached to place in this work we can see the terms of the Laudian program of the sacred interact uneasily with more expansive notions of what it means to consider a space sacred and the long inheritance of genres, forms, and figures that Milton deploys to construct his idea of the sacred. The masque is neither firmly a reformist text nor a Laudian one; its religious politics exist against a complex theological and mythographical background, which itself could be mobilized in the service of sectarian polemic.

One of the most important background figures in Milton’s depiction of Comus is obviously Bacchus, “that first from out the purple grape, / Crushed the sweet poison of

³⁰⁵ Campbell and Corns, *Life, Work, and Thought*, 96.

³⁰⁶ Corns, “Milton before ‘Lycidas,’” in *Terms of Liberty*, ed. Parry and Raymond, 34.

misused wine” (46–47), and who fathered Comus with Circe.³⁰⁷ Both Bacchus and Circe lie behind Comus’s enchanted cup and its disorienting brew, but Bacchus especially could represent, more generally, the tendency of religious inspiration to override its normal social boundaries. He was also the subject of contemporary religious polemic in the early seventeenth century. For example, Bacchus and his ritual celebrations were the subject of a short treatise by Ambrosius de Bruyn published in 1619 that expanded on precisely this aspect of the ritual celebrations of this god. De Bruyn was a Dutch scholar, and he dedicated his book to George Abbot, a powerful English clergyman who had taken an interest in the internecine Protestant conflicts in the United Provinces in the 1610s. The work in question is a summary, with digressions, of book 39 of Livy’s history of Rome, wherein Livy recounts the threat to the social order posed by clandestine Bacchic rituals. In the second century BC, Roman authorities uncovered an illegal cabal of religious enthusiasts who worshipped Bacchus at night and in secret. Livy describes their rites as extremely indecorous, transgressive, and dangerous:

Since which time that these sacrifices and ceremonies were thus divulged, and men and women intermingled together, and the licentious liberty of the night time also to help all forward, there is no act so wicked, no fact so filthie, but there it is committed: and more sinfull and unnaturall abuse there is, of mankind one with another, than there is of women. If any are either unwilling to suffer this soule filthinesse, or bestirte themselves more dully in the beastly action and performance of that villanie, such presently are to be killed and sacrificed as beasts. And this is supposed amongst them, the principall point and summe of their religion, To hold and beleve that nothing is unlawfull whatsoever.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁷ I quote the 1673 text from Carey’s and Fowler’s edition, but I will note changes among the many variants of the text when appropriate.

³⁰⁸ Livy, *The Romane Historie Written by T. Livius of Padua. Also, the Breviaries of L. Florus, with a Chronologie to the Whole Historie, and the Topographie of Rome in Old Time*, trans. Philemon Holland (London, 1600), 1030–31.

The Senate decided, upon hearing the account of these rites, “That proclamation be made at Rome, and edicts sent out throughout all Italie, that no person whatsoever, who had beene sacred and prosessed religious by the priests of *Bacchus*, resort any more into assembly or conventicle for those sacrifices, ne yet doe ought pertaining to such divine service” (1031). Their reasoning was that there was “nothing so forcible to ruinate and overthrow religion, as when divine service is celebrated after some straunge and forraine fashion, and not according to the auncient custome of the place” (1033). Livy’s account argues that secret religious rituals, those done at night and not under the auspices of the civil authorities, endanger the security of the entire state, not least because they encourage many people to participate in the same rite and thus foster an alternate, divergent religious community.

Thus it is no surprise that de Bruyn links this rather obscure historical episode to developing confessional controversies unfolding both in England and in the Netherlands. In fact, de Bruyn links the transgressive Bacchanalian rites described by Livy to enthusiastic Protestant sects that have traditionally threatened civic unity:

Ostendam, Deo & Musis faventibus, per dies Baccho sacros, in pretio fuisse & nonnullis in locis esse constupratores, homines fanaticos, coetus nefarios, scelera, libidines vagas & promiscuas, strepitus & clamores nocturnos Cyclopicos. Me hercle, rem ex re iudicare si volumus accuratius pressiusque, ab Anabaptisticis furoribus & sacris parentum nostrorum memoria haud auspicate introductis, non omnino discrepare videtur, hic, qui Baccho sacer cultus, stulte creditur atque insulse.³⁰⁹

[I will show, with the help of God and the muses, that, on days sacred to Bacchus, it was held as a good thing in some places to have debauchers, crazed men, illegal gatherings, promiscuous and wild passions, shouts, and nocturnal, Cyclopic howlings. Indeed, if we wish accurately and deliberately to appraise the matter from its essence, then it will appear that this foolish and stupid belief in the sacred worship of Bacchus accords completely with the belief of those furious Anabaptists, whose rites were inauspiciously introduced in our parents’ time.]

³⁰⁹ De Bruyn, *In Originem, Usus Foedum, et Ritum Profanum, Bacchanaliorum, Oratio* (London, 1619), sig. B2v. My translation follows.

Yet, as de Bruyn indicates, all these nefarious activities are actually thought to be religious by the minority who practice them as such. This proves the ancient maxim: “Religio velum est, quod scelus omne tegit” (sig. B3r) (religion is the veil that covers every crime). The Anabaptists, along with other Protestant sects, throw up the veil of “religion” over various practices that actually work against civic order. Crucially, it is this civic order that should be the ultimate goal of religious practice, says de Bruyn. And for him this accords with a temperate, modest Christianity that respects authority; indeed the responses of the Roman consuls proceed according to de Bruyn’s conception of true religious authority. They suppress the rites but allow some expressions of traditional Bacchic worship. The parallel is so clear that de Bruyn feels he needs to explain that while the Bacchic rites do anticipate later Christian rituals of baptism, modern baptismal practices have often been tainted by those who merely profit from the name of Christ but deny the fact of his humanity (quicunque saltem hominis personam sustinent & nomen profitentur; sig. [B4v]). These are the Arians, a particular bugbear of George Abbot, but they also stand in for all those who profit from the name, or form, of religion while using it to veil illicit deeds.

This historical episode thus had clear resonances within seventeenth-century religious culture, which show up in Milton’s masque in the licentious rituals of temptation practiced by Comus and his crew. This is not to deny the similarities of Comus’s rites with licit ritual celebrations such as Mayday games; I simply mean to suggest that these rites need not be seen *only* as a parody of Laudian ceremonialism, though they lend themselves readily to that interpretation.³¹⁰ Comus’s rites seem to be rather explicitly an inversion of licit ritual, which suggests that Milton is not so much parodying acceptable rituals as showing the dangers

³¹⁰ See Leah Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 193–200.

posed by the wrong *kind* of rituals altogether. Like the nocturnal worshippers of Livy's account, Comus and his followers revel in the secrecy and claustrophobic conditions of their rites. As Comus says shortly after his first appearance on stage:

Come let us our rites begin,
'Tis only daylight that makes sin
Which these dun shades will ne'er report,
Hail goddess of nocturnal sport
Dark-veiled Cotytto, to whom the secret flame
Of midnight torches burns; mysterious dame
That ne'er art called, but when the dragon womb
Of Stygian darkness spits her thickest gloom,
And makes one blot of all the air,
Stay thy cloudy ebon chair,
Wherin thou rid'st with Hecat', and befriend
Us thy vowed priests, till utmost end
Of all thy dues be done, and none left out,
Ere the blabbing eastern scout,
The nice Morn on th' Indian steep
From her cabined loop hole peep,
And to the tell-tale sun descry
Our concealed solemnity.

(125–42)

Comus, a divine being himself, also worships another divinity, here the goddess Cotytto, a Thracian goddess whose nocturnal rituals were filled with dancing and debauchery. But this makes sense because he styles himself and his companions "vowed priests." They are also punctilious in their worship of the goddess: "all thy dues be done, and none left out." The tone is one of inversion. The very word "solemnity" seems to imply a ritual performed under the sun (Latin *sol*) and thus open for all to see, but Comus revels in the concealment of his rites. There is a strong sense of social transgression here, too. "Daylight," for him, stands in for social and religious rituals that enjoin a degree of accountability on the worshipper; it "makes sin" precisely because it is the communal element of religious practice that is open to judgment by outside eyes, not to mention the eyes of god. But Comus has a different kind of

community, one sustained by mutual adherence to the minute performance of secret rituals outside of the public gaze.

Therefore, it is fitting, though problematic in some ways, that Comus disguises himself as a “harmless villager” when he wants to trick the Lady (166). Comus actually does seem to be a rustic god. He initially wonders, after hearing the Lady’s song, if she is the

goddess that in rural shrine
Dwell’st here with Pan, or Sylvan, by blest song
Forbidding every bleak unkindly fog
To touch the prosperous growth of this tall wood.
(266–69)

The Lady seems like the “genius of the wood” of the *Arcades* entertainment, who protects the plants in his care from inclement weather. This initial reaction proves prescient, but between here and the end of the masque Comus presents himself instead as an authority on the specifics of the locale. The Lady takes him to be a villager intimately acquainted with the landscape. She asks him for directions, to which he responds:

I know each lane, and every alley green
Dingle, or bushy dell of this wild wood,
And every bosky bourn from side to side
My daily walks and ancient neighborhood,
And if your stray attendance be yet lodged,
Or should within these limits, I shall know
Ere morrow wake, or the low-roosted lark
From her thatched pallet rouse, if otherwise
I can conduct you lady to a low
But loyal cottage, where you may be safe
Till further quest.
(310–20)

Comus describes himself as a guardian angel, one who knows the land and who seems to have an acquaintance with the traditions of his “ancient neighborhood.” In fact, his self representation is fairly accurate, because Comus does represent the extremes of religious investiture of specific places with sacred significance. His power derives in part from the

enclosure of his world, “within these limits.” Yet, Comus’s impression of the Lady as a guardian spirit is a clue that it is actually she who represents the correct way to understand the religious significance of sacred space because she imports heavenly, abstract principles into “each lane” of the “wild wood.”

Of course, Milton gives us a real guardian angel in the figure of the Attendant Spirit, who provides an entry point for ideas of local protection that Comus and the Lady confront later on. As Carey notes, in the Trinity and Bridgewater manuscripts Milton made it clear that this spirit was, as the Trinity MS has it, a “guardian spirit, or daemon” (p. 175). The spirit’s speech, from the beginning, sets up the notion that the earthly realm itself is, from the point of view of heaven, an enclosure of sorts. He lives, as he tells us,

In regions mild of calm and serene air,
Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot,
Which men call earth, and, with low-thoughted care
Confined, and pestered in this pinfold here,
Strive to keep up a frail, and feverish being.

(4–8)

Humans, implies the spirit, are pressed together like cattle in their mortal enclosure. This is simply the way of earthly life, so much so that the gods have divided the earth and assigned guardians to the different parts. Milton was indebted to Plutarch’s *Moralia* for the notion that demons were assigned to specific places, an idea that William Camden repeats in his *Britannia*.³¹¹ But certainly the idea was familiar to him, if only from his Nativity Ode, that each place had a specific “genius” or spirit associated with it. Yet this guardian belongs just as much to the Christian tradition of guardian angels as the pagan tradition of genius. The Spirit’s opening dialogue establishes the authority of the Earl of Bridgewater in Wales while

³¹¹ See Camden, *Britain, or a Chorographical Description of the Most Flourishing Kingdoms, England, Scotland, and Ireland*, trans. Philemon Holland (London, 1610), in “Scotland,” p. 201; and William B. Hunter, Jr., *Milton’s “Comus”: Family Piece* (Troy, NY: Whitston Publishing Company, 1983), 39.

simultaneously providing a superstructure of “blue-haired deities” (29) that link the “noble peer” (31) to the rest of the nation. It is important, though, that this spirit or demon is not necessarily a god, as Comus styles the Lady when he first sees her, but rather something in between a god and a human. His power is less direct than a god’s would be; he is more like a facilitator or guide, who only works from a distance.

When Comus reveals himself to the Lady, though, he portrays the natural world’s link with God as functionally unmediated. For him, God has created nature for use; thus, the various spirits and mediating guides are unnecessary once the function of natural objects has been established. But the Lady ferrets out a contradiction in Comus’s lengthy praise of natural indulgence, which would actually consign all the abundance to a few people; the Lady notes that this would preclude each just man from having his fair share, because “riotous” people would take it all (762). Comus claimed that “Beauty is Nature’s brag, and must be shown / In courts, at feasts, and high solemnities” (744–45). The Lady’s speech is thus meant to indict aristocratic “riot,” which allocates nature’s abundance to a few and encloses it within the terms of “the enjoyment of itself” (741). Comus seems to see sacred value everywhere in nature; for him there are religious reasons to appropriate nature’s abundance for earthly uses. But it is important that this view of the sacred is somewhat a parody of arguments from God’s omnipresence. The Lady argues for more equitable ways of distributing nature’s gifts:

If every just man that now pines with want
Had but a moderate and beseeming share
Of that which lewdly-pampered Luxury
Now heaps upon some few with vast excess,
Nature’s full blessings would be well-dispensed
In unsuperfluous even proportion.

(767–72)

David Norbrook interprets these lines as an oblique reference to the problem of enclosing common land for private purposes, which often damaged the livelihood of poor rural farmers. Indeed, a puritan preacher was arrested in 1631 for advocating “universal equality” in the face of aristocratic arguments for the magnanimous distribution of goods within a system of enclosure.³¹² Norbrook’s linkage helps to explain the paradox of Comus’s seeming liberality, how it can actually be a version of enclosure, drawing nature’s benefits toward a private, select group. In a way this is also the justification for rituals themselves: God has marked out some times, and some people, as better than others and so he demands that we respect those time and people with an outward show and “high solemnities” (745). But it is important to note that Comus’s enclosure is not meant as a criticism of *all* sacred spaces, but rather of those enclosed spaces that require overly formal, institutionalized rituals that can hide malevolence and privilege the excesses of the few in power.

The Lady argues for a more geometrical notion of the relationship between the natural sacred and political distribution. She links the distribution of natural beneficence to merit, whereby the “just man” would receive his fair “share.” But if we are to reject Comus’s defense of ritual display—albeit a hyperbolic parody of such arguments—then with what does the Lady replace it? What rituals and practices does she prize? In this context, it is important that Sabrina intervenes as a representative of the local, historical, familial, and even ritual connections to the land. As the Attendant Spirit describes her, this “goddess of the river” still retains

Her maiden gentleness, and oft at eve
Visits the herds along the twilight meadows,
Helping all urchin blasts, and ill-luck signs
That the shrewd meddling elf delights to make,

³¹² Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance*, 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 245.

Which she with precious viald liquors heals.
 For which the shepherds at their festivals
 Carol her goodness loud in rustic lays,
 And throw sweet garland wreaths into her stream
 Of pansies, pinks, and gaudy daffodils.

(842–50)

In the Spirit's telling, Sabrina is a traditional pastoral object of devotion. But the underlying concept of pastoral protection, sealed with flowers thrown into the water, seems to extend beyond the pastoral setting. Given the connotations of Comus's defense of aristocratic privilege, enclosure of land, and secret rituals, Sabrina occupies a position completely antithetical. Milton might easily have had in mind pagan goddesses who became symbols of public beneficence in the face of private greed. In Ovid's *Fasti*, Flora holds this honor; her games were instituted precisely to correct the imbalance of private power overtaking public land. As she says in Ovid's poem:

venerat in morem populi depascere saltus,
 idque diu licuit, poenaeque nulla fuit.
 vindice servabat nullo sua publica volgus;
 iamque in privato pascere inertis erat.³¹³

[it had become a custom to graze the public pastures, the thing was suffered long, and no penalty was exacted. Common folk had no champion to protect their share in public property; and at last it was deemed the sign of a poor spirit in a man to graze his cattle on his own land.]

Sabrina is at least partially a champion for the Lady's notion of temperance and justice, which would resist the enclosure both of land and of chastity. Sabrina's "office" is, as she says, "To help ensnared chastity" (907–8).

The Attendant Spirit, in his praise, fashions her still further as a kind of Cybele, the goddess who presides over the higher forms of civilization represented by the temperance and art manifested in "cultivation" of all kinds. "May thy lofty head be crowned / With many

³¹³ Ovid, *Fasti*, ed. and trans. James George Frazer, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951), 280–81.

a tower and terrace round” (933–34), he intones. We might look to any number of classical sources for this image, but especially to Ovid once again. As the *Fasti*’s narrator asks one of the Muses of Cybele, “at cur turrifera caput est onerata corona? / an primis turres urbibus illa dedit? / annuit.” (But why is her head weighted with a turreted crown? Is it because she gave towers to the first cities? The goddess nodded assent).³¹⁴ It makes sense at this particular moment to have Sabrina as a representative of cultivation and civilization, as the Attendant Spirit goes on to make a further distinction between holy and profane spaces. He advises the Lady:

Not a waste or needless sound
Till we come to holier ground,
I shall be your faithful guide
Through this gloomy covert wide,
And not many furlongs thence
Is your father’s residence,
Where this night are met in state
Many a friend to gratulate
His wish’d presence.

(941–49)

In a landscape alive with goddesses and spiritual protectors, ground can indeed be “holy”; and it is important that what makes some ground holy is, apparently, human civilization, specifically the community realized in familial identity. Sabrina as Cybele, with her towers and terraces, represents the impulse to make boundaries and protect your own kind from intrusions. But, Sabrina as Flora also is meant to evoke the communal responsibilities that such boundaries enjoin on the one erecting the walls.³¹⁵

Milton may have also been influenced, albeit obliquely, by Lucretius’s lengthy description of Cybele’s worship, which according to Lucretius manifests the importance of

³¹⁴ Ibid., 204–5.

³¹⁵ For Sabrina as a representative of hierarchical order, see Cedric C. Brown, *John Milton’s Aristocratic Entertainments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 125–28

protecting boundaries, especially boundaries associated with nation and family. This poet notes her “muralique . . . corona” (turreted crown), owing to her role as sustainer of cities. But crucially, the “Magna Mater” (Great Mother) was escorted in her processions by armed attendants, as Lucretius writes, “quia significant divam praedicere ut armis / ac virtute velint patriam defendere terram / praesidioque parent decorique parentibus esse” (because they indicate the command of the goddess that with arms and valour they be ready to defend their native land, and to be both protection and pride to their parents).³¹⁶ The Lady seems indeed to be a source of pride for her parents, but it is also clear that virtue needs arms, or some kind of extra assistance. This aid is provided both by the Attendant Spirit and Sabrina, as manifestations both of the land and of the spiritual help offered to the land by the gods. But most importantly, the worship of the Great Mother is a way to defend one’s *patriam*, or native land. It is of course evident that in the masque chastity is not only a private virtue but is coterminous with family honor and national honor. Of course, Lucretius saw this source of national honor as ultimately empty and baseless, because for him the gods do not take an active role in protecting earthly life: “omnis enim per se divom natura necessest / immortalis aevo summa cum pace fruatur / semota ab nostris rebus seiunctaque longe” (p. 146) (For the very nature of divinity must necessarily enjoy immortal life in the deepest peace, far removed and separated from our affairs). Milton’s concluding lines directly contradict this message, however. In the words of the Attendant Spirit:

Mortals that would follow me,
Love Virtue, she alone is free,
She can teach ye how to climb
Higher than the sphery chime;
Or if Virtue feeble were,
Heaven itself would stoop to her.

³¹⁶ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, ed. and trans. W. H. D. Rouse, rev. Martin Ferguson Smith, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 142–45.

(1017–22)

The sentiment is fully consonant with the masque's faith in demonic assistance and guardianship. Far from viewing God or the gods as remote from the world, Milton's *Maske* locates them in the rivers and groves of a domesticated, though still spiritual, landscape.

Sabrina's protective yet liberating rituals do not, however, have exact parallels with contemporary practice. Their connection with the land and with family is simply meant to contrast with Comus's invocations of strange, foreign gods and unfamiliar rituals. The international, alien character of Comus's riotous crew and libertine arguments only serves to underscore the potentially unifying effects of keeping the gods constrained in their native, English groves. This constraint, however, allows Milton to see expansive sacred significance within that landscape because the pagan inflections of the past now work for Christian virtue in the present. Crucially, the rites of Comus are not somehow *adapted* or *cleansed* in Sabrina's rites; they are abrogated and nullified. The two gods both have pagan origins, and also represent two poles of pagan religion itself: Comus the mysterious, secretive, and subversive, and Sabrina the communal, natural, and traditional. There is little anxiety about the pagan resonances of guardianship not because they are in fact Christian but because Christian virtue simply parallels the corresponding pagan drive to regulate the earthly manifestations of divine directive by means of demons and guardian angels. Ultimately, of course, these questions of guardianship are resolved in the psychological allegory of heavenly assistance: "Or if Virtue feeble were, / Heaven itself would stoop to her" (1021–22). Yet, these lines point to a world in which heaven invests its mediators in the earthly realm, and within a landscape receptive to such mediation.

Milton's complex representation of pagan rituals and of the underlying problem of heavenly mediation does not align completely with a Laudian or anti-Laudian position. Rather, it shows Milton rethinking the role of the sacred within his evolving literary explorations of classical genres and themes. Thus, when we move to "Lycidas," we can find a similarly complicated and ongoing evolution in Milton's representation of sacred objects and practices. However, this poem introduces the conflicts of institutional religion into the mix, which ultimately constrains Milton's attempts to rethink and expand the poetic efficacy of sacred rituals and practices. Samuel Johnson's famous critique of the poem's blend of sacred and profane remains strikingly relevant for how we as scholars continue to approach the poem, especially its pagan borrowings and anti-clerical theology. His purpose was to criticize the ecclesiastical digression—or perhaps more properly the ecclesiastical *focus*—in the middle of the poem, framed as it is with pagan pastoral images and sentiment: "With these trifling fictions are mingled the most awful and sacred truths, such as ought never to be polluted with such irreverent combinations."³¹⁷ Johnson's comment stands both as an indicator of his own poetic tastes and as a valuable insight into the poem itself, which gains power precisely as it blends the sacred and profane. It is important to note, however, that "Lycidas" actually divides the reception of paganism into two categories. That is, there is one realm wherein pagan rituals and ideas exist on the same continuum as Christian ones as long as they share similar sympathies toward sacred experience, such as guardian angels and the objects of pastoral devotion. But then Milton also introduces the specter of an institutional religion that sees in such notions of universal sacred significance an opportunity to make artificial, doctrinal distinctions and to divide the privileged clergy from lay sources of

³¹⁷ *Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton*, vol. 2, part 2, ed. A. S. P. Woodhouse and Douglas Bush (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 567.

protection and identity. For the *institutional* church, pagan rituals exist in the realm of historical traditions with the potential to “infect” or “pollute” the contemporary church. It is this side of pagan religious practice to which Milton objects; indeed, this increasing religious binary between the institutional and the intellectual—or poetic—legacies of pagan culture would inform Milton’s polemical definitions of paganism in his *Of Reformation* and elsewhere.

In “Lycidas,” though, the content and structure of the poem continually set up pagan customs of pastoral devotion as appropriate to the poet’s lament and then undercut those expressions as insufficient, fictitious, and fleeting. There are more than a few connections with Milton’s earlier representation of pastoral customs, especially in the *Maske*. The flower passage, which appears to be a later insertion by Milton (Carey and Fowler, p. 250), shows the poet calling on nature herself to honor Lycidas with

The white pink, and the pansy freaked with jet,
The glowing violet
The musk-rose, and the well-attired woodbine,
With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,
And every flower that sad embroidery wears:
And daffadillies fill their cups with tears,
To strew the laureate hearse where Lycid lies.
For so to interpose a little ease,
Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise.

(144–53)

We saw the Attendant Spirit recounting Sabrina’s pastoral worship, when shepherds would “throw sweet garland wreaths into her stream / Of pansies, pinks, and gaudy daffodils” (849–50). The similar catalogue in “Lycidas” ends with the speaker noting the imbecility of such pastoral designs; to see in these flowers a palliative for death is but to “dally with false surmise.” There is a similar emptying of significance of those “rural ditties” (32) that Lycidas and the speaker used to sing, while “Rough satyrs danced, and fauns with cloven heel, / From

the glad sound would not be absent long” (34–35). “But O the heavy change, now thou art gone” (37). The pagan sources of security have failed to protect Lycidas on his journey. As the speaker says to the nymphs, “Had ye been there . . . for what could that have done?” (57). Such representatives of festivity are not up to the task of finding ultimate meaning in death.³¹⁸

The poem’s unfolding seems to promise us that heavenly reward awaits but only if we reject the wanton nymphs and what they represent, if we refuse “To sport with Amaryllis in the shade” (68). But then we are returned to the animist world of river spirits, who parade by until finally comes the “pilot of the Galilean lake” arrives to criticize the clergy. There is some connection here between the wanton shepherds who “sport” with Amaryllis and those that “scarce themselves know how to hold / A sheep-hook, or have learned aught else the least / That to the faithful herdman’s art belongs!” (119–21). Even more importantly, these negligent shepherds affect their flock adversely by infecting them with “wind” and “rank mist.” The sheep “Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread” (126–27). The poem now portrays these pastoral shepherds and their herds as tightly organized hierarchical organizations, for which false doctrine and teaching causes infection to spread from *within*. Johnson was certainly correct in thinking that this is a jarring change of tone from the conflicts presented so far in the poem. Up to this point the problem has been how to align rituals of devotion to sufficiently mourn a fallen friend. And indeed after this passage we return to differing interpretations of natural objects. But this passage suggests that the real struggle for “shepherds” and those in their “flocks” is an internal one, with the source of conflict welling up from within and spreading outward through the entire herd. The

³¹⁸ See Lawrence Lipking, “The Genius of the Shore: Lycidas, Adamastor, and the Poetics of Nationalism,” *PMLA* 111 (1996): 205–7.

ecclesiastical metaphors take us from a pagan world where death and mourning are matters external, to a world in which the problem involves a correct interpretation of doctrinal priorities within an hierarchical structure.

The flower passage immediately follows the pilot's speech; but its failure to assuage points onward to yet another source of value in Milton poems. In contrast to the problems of internal, hierarchical conflict, the poem then sends its readers outward to follow the journey of Lycidas's drowned corpse:

Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides
Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide
Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world;
Or whether thou to our moist vows denied,
Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,
Where the great vision of the guarded mount
Looks toward Namancos and Bayona's hold;
Look homeward angel now, and melt with ruth.
And, O ye dolphins, waft the hapless youth.

(156–64)

The tide has swept Lycidas all the way to the south of England, to Bellerium or Land's End, where a chapel dedicated to St. Michael the archangel looked out over the sea. In contrast with inward rot we now see Michael as an outward looking guardian who is nevertheless encouraged to "look homeward," to reinvigorate the land with protection. This figure is intended to stand between the options for religious devotion introduced so far in the poem, either wanton sport and fame seeking, or a reliance on a broken system of ecclesiastical supervision.

The figure of guardian angel or genius of the place worked so well for Milton because it was an ecumenical notion, not specifically pagan or completely Christian but rather holding the two in suspense. Lycidas himself becomes a *genius loci* at the end of the poem; by this point the guardian of the shore is not only a pagan god of place but also a

Christianized protector of the nation, guarding the flock against the corrupted shepherds. He is, as Lawrence Lipking argues, a linkage between the “old gods” of classical poetry and the nationalist and religious imperatives of Milton’s early poetry.³¹⁹ Lycidas as guardian is an informing presence for the land, at once both spiritual and physical, partially a nature god but also a manifestation of a kind of collective consciousness.

But Milton is at pains to license this concluding sense of sacral expansiveness by contrasting Lycidas with the failings of the pastoral institutions in present-day England. Lycidas’s reincarnation marks a point of departure for the nation, imagined as the community of mourning shepherds: “Now Lycidas the shepherds weep no more; / Henceforth thou art the genius of the shore” (182–83). The pagan associations of this figure are only acceptable if they are *de*-institutionalized, and this is what Milton gives us. The temporal language, the “no more” that has been the speaker’s refrain, is here part of an imperative. The time is the present, and the shepherds have stopped weeping. These two lines look back to the famous crux of the poem, both thematically and syntactically: “that two-handed engine at the door, / Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more” (130–31). The “engine at the door” resembles the “genius of the shore” because both are figures of boundaries and guardianship. And both verses rely on the underlying root word *ingenium*, a power or force that has been put to some use for a specific purpose. The liminality of both figures is important because both would mark out moments of change and discontinuity within religious culture and national identity.

In many ways, “Lycidas” marks a culmination in Milton’s interest in paganism throughout the 1630s. On the one hand, he was clearly enamored of the idea that the pagan deities could represent local guardians and devotional practices rooted in community and the

³¹⁹ Lipking, “Genius of the Shore,” 213–14.

land. He often gestures to the importance of keeping the gods in their groves and invigorating spaces with spirits and guardians. On the other hand, he is clear that the problem with these deities lies in their propensity to nourish *institutional* corruption through tradition and custom. In the Nativity Ode, the embedded representatives of paganism—the urns and altars and idols—had to be banished. But the idea of local consecration had pan-religious significance and was safe *not* because it was cleansed and adapted to Christian culture but simply because it existed in the realm of non-Christian religion. That is, the pagan gods were already subjects of *culture* and *art*, but that subjection allowed them to have religious significance precisely in those areas that were contested by religious authorities. So, if the Laudian church was trying to appropriate pastoral devotion and pagan ideas of guardianship, those same ideas were acceptable if they were seen to originate from outside of the church, in the realm of history, art, and culture. But if pagan practices originated within the church, then they formed a part of the “new-vomited Paganisme” that Milton indicts in *Of Reformation* (YP, 1:520). In this way it appears that Milton’s representation of paganism was somewhat coherent in his early poems; “Lycidas” simply shifts the discourse to a criticism of the clergy. That poems begins to see the possibility of corruption appearing within the church once again, rather than imagining that a supernatural dispensation has removed the threat of contagion. Instead, the ecclesiastical digression shows how ideas of sacred space could increasingly be yoked to ideological differences and linked to problems of institutional authority. Milton increasingly comes to see the idea of sacred space as a dangerous one, and rejects the idea of nationalistic, or ecclesiastical, protection because it so easily leads to institutional overreach and corruption.

In *Of Reformation*, published four years after he wrote “Lycidas,” Milton develops his ideas of ecclesiastical corruption to include both a resurgent pagan idolatry *and* the improper blending of sacred and secular realms. Milton’s great test case for both processes is the late-antique Christianization of the Roman empire under Constantine, who “must needs bee the Load-starre of *Reformation* as some men clatter” (*YP*, 1:555). This treatise is, after all, intended to touch on “Church-Discipline in England” (517); thus he has to justify why the first three centuries of Christianity provided a better model of church government based on scripture. Some say, he writes, that it was “a time not imitable for Church government, where the temporall and spirituall power did not close in one beleife, as under *Constantine*” (553–54). But for Milton, the union of the two realms under Constantine was a step in the wrong direction:

I am not of opinion to thinke the Church a *Vine* in this respect, because, as they take it, she cannot subsist without clasping about the Elme of worldly strength, and felicity, as if the heavenly City could not support it selfe without the props and buttresses of secular Authoritie. (554)

Milton has to discount almost the entirety of the Eusebian tradition of ecclesiastical history in order to argue that Constantine’s government was more interested in secular authority than heavenly zeal. He responds by implying that these writers, the chroniclers of Constantine’s piety, were influenced by the emperor’s favor. “They extoll *Constantine* because he extol’d them” (*ibid.*).

More important than this imputation of corruption among historians, though, is Milton’s claim that Constantine, far from being the zealous iconoclast of pagan religion, actually allowed paganism into the church:

And what *Reformation* he wrought for his owne time it will not be amisse to consider, hee appointed certaine times for Fasts, and Feasts, built stately Churches, gave large Immunities to the Clergie, great Riches and Promotions

to *Bishops*, gave and minister'd occasion to bring in a Deluge of Ceremonies, thereby either to draw in the Heathen by a resemblance of their rites, or to set a glosse upon the simplicity, and plainnesse of Christianity which to the gorgeous solemnities of *Paganisme*, and the sense of the Worlds Children seem'd but a homely and Yeomanly *Religion*, for the beauty of inward Sanctity was not within their prospect. (556)

Milton's argument anticipates his later, mature thinking about true religion and the relationship between paganism and Christianity. A relapse into paganism is more than a remote possibility for Milton; the ceremonies that Constantine introduced could be seen as ways to entice pagans through "resemblance" of their own rituals. The outward manifestation of Christian religion must always struggle, according to Milton, with the "inward Sanctity" that discriminates true religion. But paganism is also an internal threat in this passage: by showering gifts and favor on the clergy and ecclesiastical elites, he makes them more prone to accept the goods of the world as their proper concern. In language that recalls his ecclesiastical "digression" in "Lycidas," Milton writes, the clergy under Constantine forsook their duty to God alone and "set themselves up two Gods instead, *Mammon* and their Belly, then taking advantage of the spiritual power which they had on mens consciences, they began to cast a longing eye to get the body also, and bodily things into their command." They supported "their inward rottenes by a carnal, and outward strength" (577).³²⁰ The test for the clergy is their inward righteousness, or lack thereof; this inner corruption leads them to forsake their duty to the god *above* the world and seek to worship a god that is of the world.

Milton's critique in *Of Reformation* is implicitly aimed at a version of political theology expounded by Eusebius of Caesarea in his account of Constantine's supposed success in overthrowing paganism completely. In his *Life of Constantine*, Eusebius shows

³²⁰ For Milton's reliance on critiques of clerical vice tied to bodily fixation, see Achsah Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community from Herbert to Milton: Literature, Religion, and Cultural Conflict in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 149–56.

how Constantine brought the interests of empire into line with the interests of religion; and indeed, for Eusebius one of the emperor's greatest achievements was to realize that the sites of paganism represented a threat to the newly institutionalized Christian religion. Eusebius includes a detailed description of Constantine's despoiling and destruction of pagan idols, temples, and sacred shrines. In book 3 Eusebius describes how Constantine renovated the site of Christ's sepulcher; this was necessary, "For impious men, or rather the whole Tribe of Daemons by the assistance of such men, had heretofore made it their business, wholly to involve that admirable monument of Immortality in darkness and oblivion."³²¹ But, as Eusebius argues, the efforts of those "impious men" were doomed from the start, because Christ's death had produced a kind of supernatural victory: "For the power of our Saviour (which shines with a light far more resplendent than the Sun, and which does not illustrate Bodies [as the Sun does,] but the souls of men,) had now filled the whole world with its own Raies of Light" (586). And so, with "God who was his Assistant" (ibid.), Constantine gave the order to ruin and demolish the pagan temples. The emperor even makes sure to remove the very building materials of the pagan temples and to ship them away, "thrown at a vast distance without the confines of that Region" (ibid.). This act was at once symbolic, practical, and revealing. For Constantine, the materiality of pagan practices needed to be changed; but the very assumption that physical nature was somehow important in producing true religious belief was itself a pagan one. Constantine and his elites seem to assume that the earthly realm is still alive with spirits and forces that need to be controlled by the governing

³²¹ Eusebius, *The History of the Church from our Lords Incarnation, to the Twelfth year of the Emperour Maricius Tiberius, or the Year of Christ 594 /as it was written in Greek, by Eusebius Pamphilus . . . also, The Life of Constantine in four books, written by Eusibius Pamphilus*, trans. Wye Saltonstall (Cambridge, 1683), 586. This work was readily available in Greek, Latin, French, and English, and Milton was undoubtedly familiar with it in some form (see *YP*, 1:376–77).

authority; that this control informs religious life is a key facet of Constantine's ecclesiastical regime.

In fact, Constantine had nothing against pagans as *people*; rather, he persecuted only those who *practiced* the rituals and forms of ancient religion. It is with the practices and the temples, the sites of ritual performances, that Constantine is most concerned with. This seemed to rankle Milton a good deal, and leads him to decry Constantine's efforts to entice pagans to Christianity. In fact, Constantine went even further. Like Theodosius after him, he allowed pagans to serve in his government, provided that they simply changed their worship habits. One of his first acts as emperor is of course to install his own governors:

And in the first place, most of those he sent as Governours of the Nations distributed throughout the Provinces, were persons dedicated to the salutary Faith. But, if any of them seemed addicted to *Gentilism*, it was forbidden them to Sacrifice. The same Law was imposed also upon those, who in dignity preceded the Presidents, as likewise on them that had obtained the highest pitch of honour and the power of the *Praetorian Praefecture*. For either, if they were *Christians*, he gave them permission, that they should perform what was correspondent to their Appellation: or else, if they were otherwise affected, he ordered them not to worship Idols. (565)

His actions illuminate Eusebius's conception of the proper method of church governance. For Eusebius, Christ's death was a kind of supernatural victory: pagans were easily integrated into the fold through a simple change of discipline. Eusebius is almost giddy at times in his praise of the great Christian empire that is on the verge of an unprecedented triumph over paganism, manifested in external grandeur and power. Constantine orders the "structures of the Oratories to be raised to a vast height, and the Churches of God to be enlarged both in length and breadth; as if all mankind (I had almost said) were about to unite themselves to God, and as if the madness of *Polytheism* had been wholly destroyed" (566). It is patent to

Eusebius that such a change of religion must accompany the large-scale political changes that Constantine was enacting.

And as some argued in the seventeenth century, Constantine represented a fine example of a godly ruler. His decision to unite church and state was mere prudence. As William Barlow wrote in 1609, such a strong central power actually had the effect of strengthening both religion and the empire. Barlow quotes Eusebius to the effect that Constantine's court was "*Ecclesiae instar*," like a church assembly, or a university.³²² Furthermore, the emperor's efforts to enforce religious conformity were based on universal rules governing religious practice:

it must needs be *dishonourable* for a truly-Religious King, to encertaine that into his Realme, which no Christian Emperor or King, ancient or moderne (were he a Prince absolute and hereditary, not elected vpon condition, nor enforced by violence, nor wrought vpon by feare, nor induced by irreligious Policies) would euer endure, as in *Constantine, Theodosius, Gratian, Arcadius, Honorius*, and others is manifest: yea, which the very *Heathens* in their Common-wealth would not admit; who enioyned, that none but their *Romane God*, should bee adored, and *THEY* after no other manner but their *owne Country fashion*; *Interdicting* any priuate Shrine, or particular worship *Different* from their publike Order in Religion. (116)

Barlow again cites Eusebius, appropriately enough, because the Greek historian was similarly a celebrant of the idea that state power had to enforce religious conformity. The underlying question for Protestant Englishmen was, according to Debora Shuger, how to "instantiate the holy in some sort of institutional form" without overly blending the political and the mystical or sacramental.³²³ Reformation-era religious politics often encouraged an uneasy political theology that promoted policies aimed at maintaining "publike Order in Religion." For writers such as Barlow, the emperor's political method of enforcing religious

³²² Barlow, *An Answer to a Catholike English-Man* (London, 1609), 105.

³²³ Shuger, *Habits of Thought*, 123.

conformity was actually the best way to maintain religious cohesion and, strangely, toleration. The *supernatural* overthrow of paganism paradoxically allowed Christian rulers to appropriate its practices and even its conceptual underpinnings of the “*Heathens* in their Common-wealth” into their own systems of government. But if Milton is correct and religion is a matter of inner righteousness, then the external expressions of religious devotion in the early Christian empire are still lamentably entangled with paganism. And he is especially scornful of the idea that political theology strengthened both; rather, if Constantine and his men “draw to themselves a *temporall strength* and *power* out of *Caesars* Dominion, is not *Caesars* Empire thereby diminisht?” (YP, 1:577). If paganism represents the confluence of a respect for earthly rewards and an inward inclination toward idolatry, then the process of extricating Christian culture must proceed by successive resistances and reformations that proceed from the inspiration of “inward Sanctity.”

Paganism is represented not only as a historically bounded set of ideas and practices, but also as an inward bent of mind that must be refined by conversion or else completely rejected. In *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, Milton includes a long chapter on the necessity of divorcing “unbelievers” if they do not convert:

Therefore the Apostle 2 Cor. 6. *Mis-yoke not together with Infidels*, which is interpreted of marriage in the first place. And although the former legall pollution be now don off, yet there is a spirituall contagion in Idolatry as much to be shunn’d; and though seducement were not to be fear’d, yet where there is no hope of converting, there always ought to be certain religious aversation and abhorring, which can no way sort with marriage (YP, 2:262).

This sentiment accompanies Milton’s overarching message that there *is* such a thing as absolute spiritual incompatibility. Accordingly, there must also be a disjuncture between believers and unbelievers, pure and impure. He continues to employ the “spirituall contagion in Idolatry” as an explanation for a lack of inner holiness. The essential issue in play in this

treatise is rather the liberty of Christians to manage their own relationship with the ever-present perils and temptations of paganism; thus, not being able to divorce is just as “if Christian liberty and conscience were left to the humor of a pagan staying at pleasure to play with, or to vex and wound with a thousand scandals and burdens above strength to bear” (YP, 2:267). It is important to note that, increasingly for Milton, paganism is not only a historical set of practices and rituals; rather, it is an eternally threatening inward disposition that impels people to idolatry and represents an obstacle to true religion.

But Milton obviously also advocated, strongly, the engagement with pagan learning and art and their value for Christians. In *Areopagitica* he says that Julian’s banning Christians from pagan learning was a great detriment to the faith: “So great an injury they then held it to be depriv’d of *Hellenick* learning; and thought it a persecution more undermining, and secretly decaying the Church, then the open cruelty of *Decius* and *Diocletian*” (YP, 2:509). In his commonplace book, Milton includes an entire section on knowledge of “profane writers.” It appears there that Milton saw pagan “poetry, rhetoric, and philosophy” primarily as tools to combat pagans and even heretics. He calls them “weapons,” and notes that “The Waldensians observed that skill languages is very useful even in the Church, so that the faithful, whether driven from their native land or sent abroad by their own churches, were thereby better fitted for teaching” (YP, 1:376–79). He would return to this theme in his sonnet on the “Late Massacre in Piedmont,” the home of the Waldensians:

Avenge O Lord thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold,
Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old
When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones.

(1–4)

The Waldensians are here early puritans, using their learning to combat idolatry.³²⁴ It seems that for Milton the chief use of pagan learning was martial: it was a good weapon for Christians to adapt to their own cause. This idea has a long pedigree, perhaps expressed most influentially by St. Augustine, who argued that Christians must take not only pagan learning but also pagan secular institutions and turn them to Christian uses.³²⁵ But in Milton's works it gets an even more aggressive application.

We can assign this aggression to the fact that for Milton, like Augustine, the secular realm was often "theologically neutral"³²⁶ and thus only corrupted by the powerful urge of idolaters to mix the sacred and the secular. In *Of Reformation* Milton ranges back to Constantine once again to reorient the modern reforming impulse not to the emperor's "donation" but to the propensity toward idolatry that the emperor introduced into the Western empire. In previous centuries, Constantine's donation had formed a crucial point at which "reform" within the church and empire began to be necessary. As Robert Black has demonstrated at length, Italian humanists and earlier critics of the church often associated the donation with the idea that Constantine had begun the process of destroying the pagan arts.³²⁷ For Lorenzo Ghiberti, for example, after the "Christian faith was victorious in the time of Emperor Constantine . . . Idolatry was persecuted in such a way that all the statues and

³²⁴ See William B. Hunter, "Milton and the Waldensians," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 11, no. 1 (1971): 153–64.

³²⁵ For Augustine's formulation of this idea, see *De Doctrina Christiana*, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. Migne, vol. 34, col. 63 (book 2, chapter 40).

³²⁶ R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, 2nd rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 55.

³²⁷ See Black, "The Donation of Constantine: A New Source for the Concept of the Renaissance," in *Languages and Images of Renaissance Italy*, ed. Alison Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 51–86.

pictures of such nobility, antiquity and perfection were destroyed and broken to pieces.”³²⁸

For him and others, the time of Constantine oversaw the end of the culture of pagan antiquity. Milton disagrees with this line of argument, however. The crucial act, for him, was the Western church’s denial of the eastern emperor Leo’s program of iconoclasm. He writes, “Mark Sir here how the Pope came by S. *Peters* Patrimony, as he feigns it, not the donation of *Constantine*, but idolatry and rebellion got it him” (*YP*, 1:578). That is, the Bishop of Rome used the pretense of the threat of iconoclasm to arrogate secular authority to the church. The important distinction here is that for Milton the “reformation” must not be aimed at recovering a lost, uncorrupted church. The ever-present threat of idolatry always leads to the mixing of the sacred and secular.

Because pagan learning is a weapon for Milton, he is skeptical of associating such pagan arts too closely with any one historical period that can be recovered in tandem with a religious reformation. For the Italian reformers, Constantine and his deputies had persecuted idolatry too harshly, and so the recovery of pagan arts, literature, and knowledge would be a redress for wrongs done in history. Their antiquarian investigations aimed at reconstructing a lost knowledge and implicitly reducing the improper authority the church claimed over the secular realm. While Milton also lamented the intrusion of the sacred into the secular, for him recovery of historically specific forms of sacred and secular culture should *not* be the goal of reform, for a very simple reason. Milton thinks that “antiquity” does not necessarily distinction on historical religious structures *or* cultural and artistic artifacts, because God gave wisdom to all alike.³²⁹ He quotes Lactantius, who associated this argument with those

³²⁸ Ibid., 79–80.

pagans who only believed in religion if it was traditional. He argued, according to Milton, that “wisdom, which being given alike to all Ages, cannot be prepossest by the Ancients; wherefore seeing that to seeke the Truth is inbred to all, they bereave themselves of wisdom the gift of God who without judgement follow the Ancients, and are led by others like bruit beasts” (YP, 1:562). This point applies to pagan learning, as well. It was important for Christians to have access to learning in order to combat persecutory pagans; but Milton is only concerned with learning *per se*, not that this learning must be recovered in all its historical glory. The Italian reformers were concerned with precisely that historical crux; to recover the lost arts was also to recover a time when secular culture remained distinct from religious culture. According to many of them, the overly aggressive persecution of idolatry by Constantine was part of his program to take the forms of the secular pagan culture of the time and hand it over the church (whether or not they accepted the veracity of a historical “donation”). For Milton, alternatively, Constantine did not go far enough in his persecution of idolatry; and idolatry, the urge to worship both God and Mammon, leads to sacred institutions intruding upon Caesar’s dominion and taking on the forms of temporal authority.

This mixture was, for Milton, the result of trying to invest sacred significance in particular things, or places. Adam’s mistake at the end of *Paradise Lost* is also the mistake of those who revere antiquity and tradition; to assume that God only reveals himself in particular places and times is to forget that God has dispensed wisdom equally to all. The veneration of places is the same, for Milton, as the veneration of an ideal, uncorrupted church, which never actually existed. It assumes that God’s presence can be localized, whether in particular places or particular historical moments; and this was, for Milton and

³²⁹ Milton also did not think that Protestants should be seeking an uncorrupted church in historical time but rather only in scripture; see David Weil Baker, “‘Dealt with at his owne weapon’: Anti-Antiquarianism in Milton’s Prelacy Tracts,” *Studies in Philology* 106 (2009): 207–34.

many others, one of the chief tenets of paganism. Importantly, though, for other scholars and poets, this aspect of the pagan inheritance demonstrated the extent to which Christianity itself participated in rituals and practices consonant with the light of nature.

What we see in this period is an increasing bifurcation of the significance of religious culture in terms of its historically received practices. On the one hand, universalizing discourses of natural religion and natural law could privilege the sacred significance of even the most remote historical circumstances. This privilege was based on the idea, familiar from the Eusebian tradition, that Christianity had entirely overcome its pagan foes; thus, the political and social integration of religious discipline proceeded according to God's wish that Christianity should incorporate and overtake other religions while retaining traditional forms of religious discipline that have been accommodated to Christian practice. On the other hand, writers like Milton increasingly advanced the idea that the only "universal" religious narrative that mattered was the one that argued that religious discipline was eternally divided between the pure and the idolatrous. Furthermore, this division implicated the secular realm because idolatry itself entices its adherents to blend the sacred and the civic in illicit ways. Thus, for Milton and others, paganism remained an eternally present threat to the religious and social orders. Milton fought that threat by linking sacred significance not to historical forms of devotion but with more immediate forms of religious experience, both material and abstract, which were nevertheless integrated, uneasily, into national identity. English religious culture in the years after Milton's first poetic efforts debated intensely and creatively these dual narratives of the significance of pagan religions and their implications.

Chapter 5

Robert Herrick and Little, Sacred Things

Toward the end of Robert Herrick's *Hesperides* (1648) we find this short poem, called "The smell of the Sacrifice":

The Gods require the thighs
Of Beeves for sacrifice;
Which rosted, we the steam
Must sacrifice to them:
Who though they do not eat,
Yet love the smell of meat.³³⁰

In another poem, Herrick again writes about sacrificing smoke to the gods, when he and Julia prepare to sacrifice a "holy Beast": "And (while we the gods invoke) / Reade acceptance by the smoake" (H-870). (He elsewhere styles himself a *Rex Sacrorum* [H-974], a priest who makes sacrifices.) Herrick is gesturing to a story, or an idea, as old as Hesiod's *Theogony*, which Herrick was certainly reading around the time he published *Hesperides*.³³¹ In Hesiod's poem, Prometheus tricks Zeus into accepting bones instead of meat as a sacrifice. From that time, when Zeus discovered the trick, "human beings upon the earth burn white bones upon smoking altars for the immortals."³³² Among the rituals of ancient religion that Herrick invokes, this one has a particular resonance for him. There is a recurring theme in the

³³⁰ Herrick, *Complete Poetry*, ed. J. Max Patrick (New York: New York University Press, 1963), H-736. All further quotations of Herrick's poetry will be from this edition, cited parenthetically by poem number and, in the case of longer poems, by line. *Hesperides* will be prefaced by "H," *Noble Numbers* by "N."

³³¹ See the title page of *Noble Numbers* in Patrick's edition, pp. 448–49.

³³² Hesiod, *Theogony*, ed. and trans. Glen W. Most (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 49.

mythology of ancient pagan religions of the movement from a time when the gods ruled over men to a time when men began to rule themselves. One of the earliest symbols of this process is Prometheus's substitution of the edible with the inedible in his sacrifice to the gods: this explains why humans get to eat meat while the gods are left with the bones and smoke.

Even more generally, this idea encompasses the rationale of ancient sacrifice as a representation, involving fictions of the human form rather than human bodies themselves. Book 5 of Ovid's *Fasti*, for example, recounts the process by which a practice of human sacrifice in the Tiber was replaced by a sacrifice of effigies made of river rushes. This is an important feature of how religion works for Ovid; the symbolic form overtakes and replaces the requirements of violence and sacrifice:

Now from the timber-bridge the *Vestall* chaste
The rushie pictures [*simulacra*] of old men doth cast.
Who thinks old men of sixty years to be
Thus drown'd, too much doth tax Antiquitie.
Old fame reports that when *Saturnia*
This land was call'd th' old Prophet thus did say,
Ye people to the Sickle-God deliver
Two men, thrown down into the Tuscan river.
This gift each yeare to that *Leucadian* power
Was given, till *Hercules* pitch'd on this shore.
He strawy [*stramineos*] Nobles o're the bridge threw down:
From whose example pictures [*corpora falsa*] since were thrown.³³³

The false bodies replace the requirements of human sacrifice, the result of Hercules' interventions in Italy. The replacement remains a representation of the human form, though, only composed of straw and rushes; the point is that nothing of "value" is being exchanged here, only the method of signification in sacrificial practice. Ovid has the Tiber itself give an

³³³ Ovid, *Fasti*, trans. by John Gower as *Ovids Festivalls* (Cambridge, 1640), 118–19. Latin cited from Ovid, *Fasti*, ed. and trans. James George Frazer, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951).

alternate version of this process of sacrificial substitution, wherein Greek settlers wanted their heirs to throw their bodies into the Tiber so that they could be washed back to Greece:

"Yet of their countrey they had oft a sense;
"And divers dying left these testaments;
My body into Tyber throw, that so.
My dust at length may to my countrey go.
"The Heir was much displeas'd at his command,
"And tombs his father in th' *Ausonian* land.
"A rush-weav'd image [*imago*] into me is cast
"In stead of him, to float to *Greece* at last.³³⁴

This substitution is acceptable, Ovid seems to imply, because the image encourages the act of remembrance that the original sacrifice, or quasi-sacrificial act, was meant to enforce. It is a movement away from violence and toward the sophisticated rituals of modern Rome that Ovid is explaining. And the fact that Ovid almost always provides several explanations for a modern ritual suggests that what is most important for the poet is the fact of progress and the fact that modern religion obviates the need for violence, sacrifice, and loss of money and status to the gods.³³⁵

I want to suggest that this movement of religious ritual toward representation and substitution—which we might call a constant habit of religious thinking in ancient pagan cultures—suffuses Herrick's poetry and provides a way to read the perplexing and elusive religiosity of his *Hesperides*. Indeed, this way of reading Herrick's poetry also provides a way to argue for Herrick's unassuming importance in a particular narrative of the interpenetrations of literary art with developments in early modern religion. In brief, I will argue that Herrick's interest in paganism, much noted and much interpreted, was primarily as

³³⁴ *Ovids Festivalls*, trans. Gower, 119–20.

³³⁵ This resembles the process that René Girard calls "sacrificial substitution" in his *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 269–73. Girard, however, means something different from what I am describing. By "substitution" he means the process by which a society chooses a sacrificial victim as a representative of itself; I am describing a further refinement, in which that victim is changed into an object or image, further displacing the necessity for violence.

a system of religious representation that foregrounds the symbolic manipulations of human art. Herrick's immersion in ancient religion provides him with the tool to portray religious values in two, seemingly antithetical ways: first as a progression from violence to peace through the diminished powers of divinity and the ascendancy of human art, but second as a reinvestment in the power of symbols and representations as the repository of religious value. In the *Hesperides*, Herrick's poems often see "religion" as a way to carve out artificial symbols and invest them with representational force; religion in this sense also provides the basis for a culture in which the histories of objects and their materiality provide meaning for human life. Herrick's "pagan" religion encourages the idea that to lodge the divine in representations and fictions preserves the power of divinity while effectively limiting the potential of religious distinctions to cause strife.

I. Herrick's Poetic Pagan Religion and Its Sources

Herrick's poetic engagement with pagan religion is more of a representational strategy than a consciously constructed argument for one or another contemporary religious or political faction. Nonetheless, there are important ways in which this representational basis of pagan religions played a crucial role in developments in seventeenth-century intellectual culture, and thus in shaping Herrick's poetics. Herrick himself was undeniably influenced by the Laudian conception of ecclesiastical polity and its attendant views on order, decorum, and the beauty of holiness. For Laud and Laudians, the English church was a part of an historically continuous tradition of changing rituals; Richard Hooker's inclusive conception of adaptable church rituals played an important role in defining the place of the sacred in society.

Yet, there were two directions that a Laudian notion of the sacred could pull. As Peter Lake has argued, Laud's and his sympathizers' attitudes toward sacred space were part of the archbishop's efforts to redraw "the division between the sacred and the profane in tight spatial and temporal terms."³³⁶ The Laudians wanted to reclaim the boundaries of the sacred from "puritans," who "allowed the sacred or the holy to spill out of the church and into the world."³³⁷ Yet, Achsah Guibbory, while aligning Herrick with a Laudian view of ceremony, also argues that Herrick's poetry represents an attempt to expand the reaches of the sacred, by incorporating different strands of religious tradition. She says that "The hallmark of Herrick's poetry, in fact, is an eclecticism that derives from his passion for enlarging the boundaries of the sacred."³³⁸ Moreover, "Herrick persistently mingles the sacred and the secular throughout the *Hesperides*," asking us to "reconsider the categories of sacred and profane."³³⁹ I take these comments by Lake and Guibbory both to be true, in essence: the Laudianism that wanted to contain the sacred also wanted to show its expansiveness. And they are both applicable to Herrick, and in Herrick especially we see the tensions, contradictions, and even the paradox, in this idea. But this tension, between restricting the sacred to narrow bounds and expanding the sacred to encompass historical and social experience and tradition, can also help to explain some of the parallel tensions among modern critics of Herrick. Both kinds of tension can, I suggest, be loosened if we look at Herrick's artistic method and the religious context of that method. We will discover that

³³⁶ Lake, "The Laudian Style: Order, Uniformity and the Pursuit of the Beauty of Holiness in the 1630s," in *The Early Stuart Church, 1603–1642*, ed. Kenneth Fincham (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 178.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 179.

³³⁸ Guibbory, "Enlarging the Limits of the 'Religious Lyric': The Case of Herrick's *Hesperides*," in *New Perspectives on the Seventeenth-Century English Religious Lyric*, ed. John Richard Roberts (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 31.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

Herrick's "paganism," long a cherished and heavily qualified idea, was actually a lot more important than has been recognized. But, and maybe even more importantly, we will see Herrick as participating in some of the wider shifts in early modern religious culture, especially as he revises the meaning of paganism, "false religion," and the place of art in religion itself.

Guibbory's and Lake's terms can provide us with a starting point for revision. When both of these scholars write about Laud's and Herrick's interest in the "profane," they are using the term to mean something like "secular" (hence Guibbory's interchangeable use of both terms in her essay). That is, they take the profane to be everything that is not emphatically "sacred" or set apart from everyday life. Yet this is not at all how most writers understood the "profane" in the early modern world. For them, profane meant something closer to "evil," or that which was diametrically opposed to the sacred.³⁴⁰ Among "profane" things, then, might be numbered pagan religions, especially as they were considered to be "false" creations of demons or of human priests, legislators, or poets. But focusing on this aspect of paganism in Herrick's work might be a good way to speak of his poetry both as an engagement with the most pressing questions of his time but also as an imaginative product that creates its own space apart from the world. I find in Herrick's poetry, especially in his tendency to miniaturize natural objects and produce "little" things, the same impulse celebrated by pagan poets to produce representations and symbols that deflect the forces of religious violence and strife into a realm of fiction, where they can be interpreted and understood as fictions.

³⁴⁰ For a discussion of changes in the meaning of the "profane," see Jonathan Sheehan, "Sacred and Profane: Idolatry, Antiquarianism and the Polemics of Distinction in the Seventeenth Century," *Past & Present* 192 (2006): 35–66.

This focus on the artifice of pagan religion and its symbols provides a way of interpreting Herrick's poetry that splits the differences among his critics. As recently as 2011, his most important interpreters were debating the efficacy, even the possibility, of placing Herrick in his historical context.³⁴¹ The formalist criticism of the mid-twentieth century produced important readings of Herrick's poetry that are still very valuable for the way they view his art as responding to sometimes competing, sometimes sympathetic pagan and Christian traditions. These readings attentive to form also emphasize the mythic, ahistorical quality of Herrick's art, often in explicitly structuralist terms, associating his poetry with natural cycles and ceremonies and thus with the interactions between the art of nature and the art of the poet that creates poetic meaning.³⁴² But Herrick was also, as Guibbory and others have forcefully demonstrated, a poet deeply enmeshed in his the religious and political circumstances of the 1630s and '40s.³⁴³ The "paganism" of Herrick's poetry, from this point of view, is coterminous with the Laudian project of ritual renewal, and

³⁴¹ See John W. Creaser, "'Jocond his Muse was': Celebration and Virtuosity in Herrick," in *Lords of Wine and Oile: Community and Conviviality in the Poetry of Robert Herrick*, ed. Tom Cain and Ruth Connolly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 39–64; Leah S. Marcus, "Conviviality Interrupted or, Herrick and Postmodernism," *ibid.*, 65–82; and Achsah Guibbory's response to Creaser and Marcus in the same edition, "Afterword: Herrick's Community, the Babylonian Captivity, and the Uses of Historicism," 300–316.

³⁴² For a structuralist interpretation of the *Hesperides*, see especially Peter Schwenger, "Herrick's Fairy State," *ELH* 46 (1979): 35–55; see also Thomas R. Whitaker, "Herrick and the Fruits of the Garden," *ELH* 22 (1955): 16–33; Mark L. Reed, "Herrick Among the Maypoles: Dean Prior and the *Hesperides*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 5 (1965): 133–150; Daniel H. Woodward, "Herrick's Oberon Poems," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 64 (1965): 270–284; Roger Rollin, *Robert Herrick* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1966), 125–64; Robert H. Deming, "Robert Herrick's Classical Ceremony," *ELH* 34 (1967): 327–348; Paul R. Jenkins, "Rethinking What Moderation Means to Robert Herrick," *ELH* 39 (1972): 49–65; and William Oram, "Herrick's Use of Sacred Materials," in *"Trust to Good Verses": Herrick Tercentenary Essays*, ed. J. Max Patrick and Roger B. Rollin (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1978), 211–20.

³⁴³ See Claude J. Summers, "Herrick's Political Counterplots," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 25 (1985): 165–82; Leah S. Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Randall Ingram, "Robert Herrick and the Makings of *Hesperides*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 38 (1998): 127–47; Tom Cain, "Herrick's 'Christmas Carol': A New Poem, and Its Implications for Patronage," *English Literary Renaissance* 29 (1999): 131–53; and Syrithe Pugh, *Herrick, Fanshawe and the Politics of Intertextuality: Classical Literature and Seventeenth-Century Royalism* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), .

works to lend legitimacy to the traditional, non-Christian ceremonies that remained in use in the English church. This is how “paganism functions” in Herrick, according to Leah Marcus: “Herrick’s extreme ritual eclecticism does not undercut the traditional pastimes he celebrates, but rather helps to sustain them by asserting their participation in a sacramental pattern of ‘long continuance.’”³⁴⁴ But as some have observed, Herrick’s religious affiliations were complex, and his artistic method never exactly aligns with a Laudian or even post-Laudian aesthetic; indeed, his poems often parody or even subvert the religious ceremonialism so dear to the embattled Laudians in the mid-seventeenth century.³⁴⁵

All this is beside the point that Herrick’s poetry is making about art and religious culture. We need, and Herrick practically *demands*, to read his poetry about religion in terms of his art; that is, we have to see his religion as artistic at the same time that we say his art is religious. Roger Rollin has suggested as much, that Herrick “makes a religion of his art,” though for Rollin Herrick’s art relied on the syncretism of “Christian humanism” to evade the necessity of making distinctions between true and false religion.³⁴⁶ But Herrick’s artistic religion was much more invested in the changing religious distinctions of his time than Rollin argues; any kind of “art religion” had undeniable political and cultural implications, staking a claim for the symbolic basis of religious forms that structured the secular realm of lived experience.

In fact, to view Herrick’s religion as coterminous with his art is to claim him as sympathetic to a certain kind of Laudianism, the kind that wanted to find ways to contain and limit the sacred to certain places and times, but with a distinction. For Herrick, religious

³⁴⁴ Marcus, *Politics of Mirth*, 158.

³⁴⁵ See, e.g., John W. Creaser, “Herrick at Play,” *Essays in Criticism* 56 (2006): 325.

³⁴⁶ Rollin, *Robert Herrick*, 163–64.

ritual and ceremony are not exactly *natural*, if by natural we mean that rituals align the world of nature with the world of the divine, bridging the gap between the human and the holy if only for a moment. The *form* of ritual was the most important aspect of it for Hooker and his Laudian acolytes like Peter Heylyn, because by respecting the form and not the historical meaning of a ritual Hooker could solve the problem of religious inclusiveness, allowing a diversity of non-Christian rituals if only they were adapted to the English church. But ritual in Herrick's poetry does not function this way at all. More important than the form of a ritual was its function. In the intricate constructions of his small forms, Herrick can represent a world of shifting forms that nevertheless contains another world of aesthetic and religious power. Herrick could have found a longstanding tradition associating small forms with symbolic power in both pagan and Christian theologies. But even closer in time he could have found the mythographers and scholars of his own day, who were increasingly fascinated with the mechanisms of pagan religions, the way that a "false" religion worked by creating fictions and rituals as symbolic units of meaning that responded to the needs of a certain culture in a certain time and place.

As a way in to Herrick's religious symbolism, one could focus on his obsession with "little" things in his poetry. This obsession is evident in the titles of many of his poems: "No want where there's little" (H-100); "Love me little, love me long" (H-143); "The captiv'd Bee: or, The little Filcher" (H-182); "To the little Spinners" (H-442); "Littleness no cause of Leanness" (H-461); "Little and loud" (H-600); and, most famously, "A Ternarie of littles, upon a pipkin of Jellie sent to a Lady" (H-733). The epithet "little" also appears conspicuously and often throughout the collection. Before I discuss the effects of Herrick's poetic "littles," though, it is important to note that the way that we approach littleness,

whether formally or symbolically, has consequences for how we understand Herrick's poetry. If we take Herrick's little forms to be a way for him to parody or mock the things that he has shrunk, then "littleness" is best understood formally as a reduction of size without a simultaneous refinement of subtlety. But, if we take Herrick's little things as refinements, evidence of increasing artifice and representational complexity inversely related to magnitude, then we will see his small forms as symbols of natural and divine power. This latter conception of smallness seems most appropriate for Herrick's poetry, because most of the time if something is "little" it is, to put it simply, good. "Littleness no cause of Leannesse," as Herrick reminds us.

Herrick's insects and faeries also have a philosophical and religious ground to claim as their own. The idea that nature displays her craft more subtly in small things than in large was a principle that Pliny the Elder discussed at length. In Philemon Holland's translation:

in no thing elsewhere, is more seen the workmanship of Nature, than in the artificiall composition of these little bodies. In bodies of any bignes, or at leastwise in those of the greater sort, Nature had no hard peece of worke to procreat, forme, and bring all parts to perfection; by reason that the matter whereof they be wrought, is pliable and will follow as she would have it. But in these so little bodies (nay prickles and specks rather than bodies indeed) how can one comprehend the reason, the power, and the inexplicable perfection that Nature hath therein shewed? . . . there is nothing wherein Nature and her whole power is more seene, neither sheweth she her might more than in the least creatures of all.³⁴⁷

This idea also took on theological connotations, suggesting that God often works the greatest miracles by means of the smallest things.³⁴⁸ The Plinian idea that natural artifice is best displayed in little things thus encourages a method of reading that sees size inversely related to significance. It was a common interpretive pivot to find in lowly, humble, and small things

³⁴⁷ Pliny, *The Historie of the World*, trans. Holland (London, 1601), tome 1, 310–11 (book 11, chaps. 1–2).

³⁴⁸ See Eric C. Brown, "The Allegory of Small Things: Insect Eschatology in Spenser's 'Muiopotmos,'" *Studies in Philology* 99 (2002): 251–53.

evidence for the greatest workings of divine art. But we will mistake Herrick's purpose if we completely align him with this tradition. Rather, Herrick's little things resist inversion into the highest things; they resist transcending their forms and actually seem to emphasize the loss implied by their relation to a normative "bigness." But this loss forms the center of their symbolic power: they represent the shrinking down of religious imagery, its reduction to the small form that remains small. But by remaining small, Herrick's little things come to represent the dislocation of religious power into natural objects transformed into socially and civilly useful art objects.

And in this respect, the idea that Herrick's little things are best read as indications of artifice (whether Herrick's or nature's), aligns Herrick with a particular kind of interpretive work being done on pagan religions by his contemporaries. For in the seventeenth century, pagan religions were often read as religions of various kinds of *reductions* and *detractions* from "true" religion. This was not always the case. Mythographers and religious thinkers alike had often considered pagan religions to be the result of what happened when natural reason was left alone to come up with conceptions of the divine. Natural reason suspected, fairly intuitively, that the good things of this world should be worshipped; consequently, the rituals of natural religion were themselves *natural*. Of course, this is a best-case scenario: in practice, rituals could be contaminated by priests or poets, or evil ones could become entrenched through tradition. This was, essentially, an allegorical way to look at pagan religions, assuming that the allegory always had its basis in natural reason. But this is not how Herrick seems to view pagan religions: they are decidedly messier for him, more rooted in an uneasy interplay between human art and natural objects. Indeed, Herrick's natural forms are consciously and purposefully changed, most often shrunk down. And for a certain

group of scholars of pagan myth, this artistic license might have made perfect sense. Among the literati of Europe interested in such things, pagan religions were increasingly seen as artful deformations, either of sacred scripture, sacred rituals, or of natural objects (or perhaps of all three at once). Read in this way, pagan religions tend to be portrayed as fictions, shadow representations of already established sacred truths; moreover, this way of interpretation argued that pagan religions were simply representational systems, designed consciously as symbolic economies reflecting the mores of a given society. The artificial, rather than the natural or allegorical, was the most important mode for pagan religion.

As might be evident, the natural and the artificial views of religion jostled with each other even in the seventeenth century. The former view, entailing a faith in a natural religion that was continuous with Christian history, was favored by Laudian polemicists interpreting Richard Hooker. The latter view was perhaps more complicated; its view of natural religion was radically discontinuous with Christianity because it essentially blamed the pagan “mistake” on a misinterpretation of nature, a failing of natural knowledge. This discontinuity made it seem that the pagan religion was an emulation of the ancient Hebrew religion and, consequently, an attempt to reduce monotheism into the discrete idols and objects of polytheistic worship. The polymathic John Selden, to whom Herrick dedicates one of the poems of *Hesperides*, provides a characteristically complicated explanation of this phenomenon in his *De Diis Syris* (1617, 2nd ed. 1629). In this work, Selden argues that the pagan religion was not necessarily *trying* to detract honor from the one true God by assigning divinity to created things; rather, it was *also* trying to emulate sacred truths, though it ended up turning them into profane trifles: “Ita certe quotquot nova Numina venerati sunt, non honori tantummodo Dei Opt. Max. divinitatem rebus ascribendo creatis, plerumque

detraxere, verum & sacro illius verbo sive scriptis sive ore tradito, ad profanas suas, quae sacra vera etiam saepissime aemulabantur, affanias sunt abusi”³⁴⁹ (Thus certainly they venerated any number of new deities, not solely to take away honor from the supreme God by ascribing divinity to created things, but also to be sure they frequently emulated sacred truths derived from the word of God or from holy writ or tradition, and they perverted them into their profane babblings). This is the point of Selden’s subsequent citation of 1 Maccabees 3:48, “And [the Israelites] laid open the book of the law, wherein the heathen had sought to paint the likeness of their images.”³⁵⁰ Selden is trying to figure out whether the Gentiles looked through the sacred Hebrew scriptures in order to create their own gods in the mold of the Hebrew gods, or whether the Gentiles wanted to show that the Jews are idolaters, or whether they wanted to compel the Jews to worship pagan gods.

He cites examples of all three, but he seems to think the passage means that the Gentiles were trying to model their idols on the gods of sacred scripture: “Haud satis capio; nisi tunc temporis idola sua non sine norma aliqua e Sacris Literis deprompta formari voluerint” (2:230) (I do not fully understand this passage; unless it means that in that time they wished their idols to be formed by a certain pattern drawn from holy scripture). But he goes on to complicate this idea: “Sed demum ut simpliciora illa πολυθεότητος initia tam male acceptae sacrae cabalae, quam admiranti, & dum coelestia corpora suspiciebat, coecutienti rationi naturali deberi quis jure autumet, satis reddidimus manifestum” (2:231) (But finally it appears unmistakable that the more genuine origins of polytheism are owed to both the malicious application of sacred practice, and to blind natural reason, which produces wonder

³⁴⁹ Selden, *De Diis Syris* (rev. ed., 1629), in *Joannis Seldeni Jurisconsulti Opera Omnia*, ed. David Wilkins, 3 vols. (London, 1726), 2:230 (my translation follows); further references will appear in the text.

³⁵⁰ All citations of the Bible are from the Authorized (King James) Version.

when it gazes up into the heavens). The idea of the insufficiency of “blind natural reason” is one of Selden’s favorites;³⁵¹ his point here though is that natural reason, taken up by itself, is often insufficient to understand the phenomena it attempts to explain. So, pagan theology, for Selden, is the result both of a parody of sacred practices and of the misinterpretation of natural bodies.

This misinterpretation is based on the idea of worship as divided from its sources in the heavenly bodies. The media of worship are the idols and symbols by which the pagan try to close the gap between themselves and the heavenly gods.³⁵² Their divinities were worshipped via “symbola, seu divinitatis velut tesseras sive indicia” (2:241) (symbols, which are tokens or signs of divinity): “Cum enim ob coelestium corporum distantiam, sacra eis ad votum fieri haud ita commode potuerint, symbola huiusmodi, quae viderentur inprimis congrua, in eorum honorem consecrare pium esse judicabant” (ibid.) (on account of the distance of the celestial bodies, they were not able easily to make religious offerings to them, and so they thought it a matter of duty to offer in their honor these sorts of symbols, which seemed especially fitting to them). And as Selden concludes, this method of dealing with distant objects of devotion led to the blurring of the distinction between the object and its earthly representation, so that eventually “Neque ita intererat, an symbolum, an numinis ipsius, an symboli figuram adorarent” (2:243) (it made no difference whether they worshipped the symbol, the form of the god itself, or the form of the symbol).³⁵³ The religion

³⁵¹ See e.g. my “Legal Theories and Ancient Practices in John Selden’s *Marmora Arundelliana*,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 72 (2011): 410–11.

³⁵² On Selden’s interpretation of pagan symbolism, see G. J. Toomer, *John Selden: A Life in Scholarship*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1:217–18. Toomer notes that Selden’s perspective resembles Eusebius’s critique of Porphyry’s explanation of pagan symbolism in Eusebius’s *Preparation for the Gospel*.

that Selden describes is a complex system for transferring symbolic meaning. It is also mimetic, in that it imitates truly sacred practices gleaned from the Hebrews; but even more importantly, it was designed to imitate, and thus alleviate, the distance between humans and the divine via symbols and idols, through a symbolic transfer of meaning from sacred to profane. The importance for Selden was the fictive, imitative force of pagan religious forms; this is what made them work, though also what made them confused and false.

As Peter N. Miller argues, in Selden's hands the study of pagan religions reached "back to the earliest human history; study of their worship, in turn, linked religion to the beginning of symbolic representation." "Art and religion" thus had a common origin, in rites commemorating the dead, but pagan religions eventually blurred the lines between art and religion. Selden's theory of "symbol-creation" made sense of pagan religions as a constantly shifting symbolic structure in which worship lodged by turns in the god, his symbol, and its figure.³⁵⁴ By way of investigating pagan theology as a system of symbol creation, Selden is also injecting ambiguity into the very idea of a "symbol" as a unit of meaning. For Plato, the "symbol" had denoted loss and separation, not a very stable foundation upon which to construct religious worship.³⁵⁵ But for his followers, such as Porphyry, symbolism formed the basis of pagan religion, because every god perfectly matched up with a natural phenomenon, of which the god was the symbol.³⁵⁶ And it should go without saying that this

³⁵³ This explanation of the origins of pagan religion can be traced back at least to Moses Maimonides; see *The Guide of the Perplexed*, ed. and trans. Shlomo Pines, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 2:516–17 (book 3, chap. 29).

³⁵⁴ Miller, "Taking Paganism Seriously: Anthropology and Antiquarianism in Early Seventeenth-Century Histories of Religion," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 3 (2001): 196.

³⁵⁵ See Plato, *Symposium*, trans. W. R. M. Lamb, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 140–41.

kind of allegorical interpretation of paganism had been deployed by many during the Renaissance to license reading pagan myths. Selden's analysis of the disjuncture of god, symbol, and figure in ancient paganism is extraordinary because he is subverting that tradition. The "symbols" of pagan religion do not really signify anything essential because they are interchangeable with divinity itself or with a representation of that divinity. Thus the gods of paganism are merely symbols, and the symbols are the gods. One might expect to hear something like this from Jacques Derrida rather than a seventeenth-century philologist! Like Derrida, Selden insists on the fundamental identity, at least in *pagan* religions, of the representation with that which is represented.³⁵⁷ Selden argues that pagan theology is a theology of spiritual emptiness because it exists purely in representations: the pagans put the gods in symbols and tokens, which eventually became gods themselves. It is a theology of small forms in that it consciously seeks to shrink the objects of its devotion into idols, small objects whose symbolic power derives purely from their status as representations.

Selden's definitions contributed to a discourse of pagan theology that was attaining ever more complexity in the seventeenth century. Partly, this discourse was spurred on by the seemingly urgent necessity to distinguish true from false religion. Alexander Ross was not alone when he acknowledged in 1655 that "all Societies of men in all Ages, and in all parts of the Vniverse, have united and strengthened themselves with the Cement of Religion; finding both by experience, and the light of nature, that no human Society could be durable, without the knowledge and feare of a Deity, which all Nations do reverence and worship,

³⁵⁶ See Porphyry's thoughts on pagan symbolism quoted in Eusebius of Caesarea, *Preparation for the Gospel*, trans. E. H. Gifford, 2 vols. (1903; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), 1:122–26.

³⁵⁷ See Derrida's discussion of symbols and the *representamen* in his *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 45–50.

though they agree not in the manner of their worship.”³⁵⁸ The ubiquity of religion was a widely held, commonplace belief, but its particular force appears clearly in this historical moment, when scholars like Selden were setting up ever more complicated distinctions among differing religions. Ross, on the other hand, was looking for the commonalities between paganism and Christianity, and finding pagan religions to be especially good *civil* religions:

In the View of all Religions, we may observe how the Children of this world [i.e., pagans] are wiser in their Generation than the Sons of God [i.e., Christians]; for they spare no paines and charges, they reject or slight nothing commanded them by their Priests and Wizards; they leave no meanes unattempted to attaine happinesse: See how vigilant, devout, zealous, even to superstition they are; how diligent in watching, fasting, praying, giving of almes, punishing of their bodies, even to death sometimes; whereas on the contrary we are very cold, carelesse, remisse, supine, and luke-warme in the things that so neere concerne our eternal happinesse. They thought all too little that was spent in the service of their false gods, wee think all is lost and cast away which wee bestow on the service of the true God. They revered and obeyed their Priests, wee dishonour, disobey and slight ours; they observed many Festivall daies to their Idols, we grudge to give one day to the service of the true God. They made such conscience of their Oaths taken in presence of an Idol, that they would rather loose their lives, than falsifie these Oaths: But wee make no more scruple to take the name of God in vaine, to sweare and forswear, than if we worshiped *Iupiter Lapis*, meer stocks and Stones; such reverence and devotion they carried to their Idols, that they durst not enter into their Temples, nor draw near their Altars, till first they were purified; they did not onely kneel, but fall flat on the ground before their feigned Gods; they knock their breasts, beat their heads to the ground, teare their skines, wound and cut their flesh, thinking thereby to pacifie their false gods: Whereas we will not debarre our selves of the least pleasure or profit to gaine Heaven.

(“To the Reader”; bracketed portions added)

³⁵⁸ Ross, *Pansebeia, or, A View of All Religions in the World* (London, 1655), “Epistle Dedicatory.” Further references will appear in the text.

It is important to recognize that though this was a very familiar project—finding paganism to be a repository of exemplary religious ethics as a way to critique modern Christianity³⁵⁹—it seems that at this point in the seventeenth century the very idea of “religion” threatens to become hollow. If all that “religion” means is obedience to conventional social mores, then distinctions of “true” and “false” are difficult to apply. Ross wants to have it both ways: he wants to call pagan religions (and many others) false, but that distinction is blurred when he goes to great lengths to explain how they have been *useful* to society. By creating and applying distinctions of natural and social knowledge, Selden is resisting Ross’s leveling impulse, which threatens to unmoor religion from natural or revelatory truths. In studies of paganism, the definition of “religion” was moving in two directions, as evidenced by Selden’s and Ross’s works. It was becoming synonymous with socially approved morality and practice, on the one hand. On the other, it was increasingly seen as a way to understand human relationships systematically, in terms of the way they created meaning. Thus, Ross focuses on ethics and Selden focuses on the interplay between natural knowledge and modes of religious representation: symbols, idols, and other fictions.

So, for the scholars of pagan religions, the problem was increasingly how to square the social, exoteric functioning of ancient religion, and perhaps all religions, with the various mistakes that the ancients made when translating natural knowledge into practice. This problem, of reestablishing the links between natural truth and religious practice, was taken up by G. J. Vossius, the Dutch scholar who was a sometime canon of the Church of England. His massive *De Theologia Gentili et Physiologia Christiana* (1641) was dedicated to the English clergy, lending his work at least some polemical urgency. Vossius, like Selden, was

³⁵⁹ See, e.g., Frank Grady, *Representing Righteous Heathens in Late Medieval England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

attuned more to the esoteric aspects of pagan theology; but in the process of examining esoteric religions—and here again like Selden—he was trying to explain the exoteric forms of all religions by looking at how they integrated natural knowledge into their modes of worship. However, Vossius complicates Selden’s symbol theory of pagan religions. Vossius distinguished between two types of pagan worship, one symbolic and the other “proper”:

“Proprium voco, quando, quod colitur, proprie & in se Deus esse existimatur. Qualis fuit cultus solis ipsius, vel Herculis, sive Thebani, sive alterius gentis. Symbolicum appello, cum quid colitur, non quia credatur Deus; sed quia Deum significet. Quomodo Sol cultus in igni Vestali, Hercules in statua” (I call it *proper* when what is worshipped is thought to have God in it. This is the worship of the sun itself, or Hercules, whether as the Theban Hercules or that of another nation. I call it *symbolic* when what is worshipped is not done because it is believed to be God but because it signifies God: just as the sun is worshipped in the Vestal fire, or Hercules in a statue).³⁶⁰ He also distinguishes between “spiritual” and “corporeal” proper worship. The spiritual has further divisions: “Spiritus vel est summus, vel medius, vel imus. Summus, ut mundi opifex; cuius veneratio in falso cultu consideratur, quatenus corrumpitur, si inter eum & alterum honos divinus dividatur: vel si Deus colatur in idolo. Medius spiritus est angelus bonus, malusve, quorum utrumque daemoniorum nomine Platonici intelligent. Imus spiritus est genius, sive anima defuncti” (30) (The “spiritual” worship is either of the high, medium, or low variety. The highest kind is the worship of the creator of the world, veneration of whom may be considered false worship when it is corrupted, if the divine honor is divided between him and another, or if God is worshipped in

³⁶⁰ Vossius, *De Theologia Gentili, seu Physiologia Christiana*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt, 1668), 30 (my translation). Further references will appear in the text. For discussion of Vossius’s distinction, see Martin Mulrow, “Antiquarianism and Idolatry: The *Historia* of Religions in the Seventeenth Century,” in *Historia: Empiricism and Erudition in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Gianna Pomata and Nancy G. Siraisi (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 202–3.

an idol. The middle kind is the worship of a good or bad angel, both of which the Platonists call by the name of demons. The lowest kind is the worship of a guardian spirit or the spirit of the dead). Vossius seems to be arguing that idol worship is not the kind of “symbolic” worship that Selden thought it was; rather, it was a kind of spirit worship, but for Vossius the key point was that pagans conceived of the “spirit” in an immanent sense. That is, they thought the spirit actually resided in the object of worship, whereas in Selden’s account there is at least the possibility that symbols, or tokens, represent abstractly the celestial bodies that were the true objects of worship. This is all to say that Vossius is even more convinced than Selden that all worship depends on the natural conditions of that worship. Idols are inherently divided things: they represent the division of honor owed to the one, true God. Vossius restricts the signifying power of natural objects pretty severely, arguing that for worship to be “symbolic” it must involve objects that are artistic and are explicitly recognized as such. The Vestal fire and the statue of Hercules, both exist in the realm of ceremony and art recognized as such. Vossius, more so than Selden, sees the histories of art and the history of religion diverging rather than converging in ancient religion.

Both Selden and Vossius, though, see pagan religion as the result of a certain kind of reduction or division of divine significance. And this idea of symbolic reduction made paganism a religion that was constantly seeking out ways to fit the objects of human art into their necessary place in the symbolic system. Pagan religion, as related by these scholars, reflects the logic of sacrificial substitution with which I began this chapter, wherein symbolic sophistication represents an advance of civilization over the cruel demands of the primitive gods. Both Selden’s and Vossius’s work is interested in the correspondence between the

symbolic economy of pagan theology and the way that economy translates into lived experience in the practices of pagan societies.

II. Herrick's Poetry of Miniatures

We can find this same correlation of symbolic thinking and real-world consequence in Herrick's poetry, which often seems like a meditation on the ways that meaning is created by seeking the kind of symbolic "fit" that Selden saw in the pagan worship of god, symbol, and figure. But Herrick is more interested in a version of Vossius's idea of "proper"—as opposed to symbolic—worship, in which natural objects used religiously do not signify as symbols but only as evidence of how the divine is "divided" by reducing it to the earthly realm.

Consider Herrick's "Ternarie of Littles" (H-733), which combines several ideas that I have been discussing. Herrick's poem withholds a straightforward valuation of "little" things. His littles seem unimportant at first glance, a catalogue of the poet's lack of material things. We may be meant to set "littleness" against a normative "bigness," or at least a kind of ideal "mean." But Herrick complicates this idea by coupling the word "little" with the word "fit" in each line. His little things somehow "fit" different kinds of containers that Herrick selects for them. This is more than merely a decorous way of organizing things by size, though. And here there *is* a parodic intent on Herrick's part: he is suggesting that symbols do not get their meanings from their inherent signifying power but rather from their setting, which has only to do with size. Assuming that Herrick knew that little things were supposedly more complex than big things, it is notable then that Herrick focuses not on the intricacy of small things but in fact on their size relative to their containers. But once we see the parody of symbolic meaning, we realize that this is a very "pagan" poem indeed because pagan religious

symbolism pointedly confused the relationships between symbols, figures, and what they ultimately signified.

There is an ethical dimension of Herrick's poem, too, which complements the symbolic play. Herrick's speaker is, as he is in other poems, content with little. Here, though, this littleness seems to structure more than simply the speaker's relationship to his "stuff":

A Little Saint best fits a little Shrine,
A little prop best fits a little Vine,
As my small Cruse best fits my little Wine.
(H-733)

It seems not to matter for Herrick whether the container or the contained comes first in his lines; what matters is the "fit" between the two. The point here is that framing produces meaning, that "little" things reach their full significance by being framed by other little things. On one level, this is a poem about the aesthetics of form: Herrick's little things achieve some dignity by being fitted to appropriate settings. This is how Herrick copes with the diminution of his own, or his speaker's, symbolic significance. It is important, then, that the poem begins with the "saint" in its "shrine": what might connote an "idol" of Catholicism has been reduced to a "little" thing alongside Herrick's "little Wine" and "little Bread." Herrick has assured that these religious symbols only signify through their formal frames, instead of through their correspondence to transcendent qualities. He has disrupted the lines of correspondence between the symbol and its divine referent, to be sure, but he has also played with the figure by which the symbol is expressed. The saint, wine, and bread, along with everything else in the poem, are always *contained* in something else that frames and changes their meaning.

This poem stands for many others in Herrick's collection in its disruption of natural meaning, the idea that symbolic language gets its meaning from the natural correspondence

of word and thing. Selden had investigated precisely that aspect of the development of symbolic language in his *De Diis Syris*, when he argued that the mistakes, and outright fictions, of the pagans could produce the linguistic and semantic confusion of symbols. I want to suggest, though, that Herrick could find pagan fictions to be artistically and religiously generative. The parody of symbolic meaning in the “Ternarie of Littles” turns out to have a positive spin: by seeking the “fit” between little things, Herrick shows us how the diminution of symbols can actually serve a civilizing purpose. Just as pagan religion saw itself becoming more sophisticated the more it relied on representations, Herrick finds that religious imagery benefits from increasing levels of symbolic and formal abstraction. The form of Herrick’s “little” things is coterminous with their content, in the sense that what appears initially as a lack of something one might want to have more of—like “Wine,” or just “stuffe”—becomes framed as a gain by the mediating idea of “fitness.” This is not mere decorum, because we are dealing with inherently undignified, “little” things to begin with. But Herrick’s littles turn out to serve much the same function as the pagan sacrifices, as objects whose reduced size and power nonetheless cement social and political bonds. As he concludes, Herrick reminds us that we are reading a poem about a gift:

A little meat best fits a little bellie,
As sweetly Lady, give me leave to tell ye,
This little Pipkin fits this little Jellie.

By the end of the poem, the little things of Herrick’s environment do take on a kind of power as objects that he can use to promote civility and community. But they do this not as symbols of the highest things but as artistically wrought and reduced symbols of immanent, rather than transcendent religious values.

What is remarkable about this poem is how Herrick resists the easy move that he might have made to encourage us to see in these lowest of things symbols of the highest of things. The “Ternarie” verse form might easily mimic the holy trinity, and the small things of Herrick’s surroundings might come to seem powerful precisely because of their potential for inversion. We expect this from other Renaissance writers who were interested in what Rosalie Colie defined as the “small form,” an intricately constructed emblem poem of sorts, in which meaning depends on the constant analogical shifting between high and low, divine and earthly.³⁶¹ But Herrick does not do this, or at least he blocks what would have been a familiar mode of interpretation. Rather, he actually revels in the loss of power of the traditional religious imagery he includes. The religious imagery is reduced, shrunken, in order to redirect its focus to the horizontal bonds of community and individual. Writing about these religious objects in terms of their size and “fitness” confuses the traditional notion of small things acting as intricate symbols of larger things. In Herrick’s poetry, it is important not to ignore the reality of religious imagery that is reduced and diminished: in his hands the symbolic meaning of “little” religious objects does not act in a simple inversion but as a dispersal of “religious” significance. This dispersal makes the parodic bent very important and real; however, the parody is not necessarily aimed at a particular religious tradition but rather attempts something larger: a reorientation of religion itself as a system of symbolic refinement that sees in “little” things potential sources for non-transcendent signification.³⁶²

What prevents Herrick from becoming a poet of transcendence is his reluctance to rely solely on form for meaning. The form of the little things in the “Ternarie of Littles” is

³⁶¹ Colie, *The Resources of Kind: Genre-Theory in the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 37–38.

³⁶² Herrick, like George Herbert, uses parody to redefine religious values; see Anthony Martin, “George Herbert and Sacred ‘Parodie,’” *Studies in Philology* 93 (1996): 443–70.

not as important as their “fit,” the way they function in tandem with their container or what they contain. “Content, not cates” (H-312), as he remarks elsewhere: “’Tis not the food, but the content / That makes the Tables merriment.” The food functions differently depending on the poet’s mood. A similar sentiment arises from time to time in *Hesperides*. “Devotion makes the Deity” (H-288), he argues, and “Who formes a Godhead out of Gold or Stone, / Makes not a God; but he that prayes to one.” Practice determines value here, not necessarily the form or the material of the idol. Devotion also gives religious worship its particular forms, which are complex products of history and tradition. In “Corinna’s going a Maying” (H-178), the poet says that “Devotion gives each House a Bough, / Or Branch” (lines 32–33), which were symbols of pagan worship. What makes a symbol mean something, for Herrick, is not that its form might correspond to some idea or object beyond itself; rather, symbols work because they are broken, lacking in some way, and thus depend on an imposition of meaning—in “devotion” or other forms of practice—to make them function. The symbolic “break” can be expressed in terms of size, as in Herrick’s little food or little wine, or in terms of a lack of divine presence, as in the idol. What vivifies a symbol is the realization that it does not signify apart from its context, or the “fit” between its form and its function. Thus, in a poem full of the old-fashioned imagery of the pilgrimage, the religious imagery revolves around the idea that they “fit” the current situation of Herrick himself:

My Crosse; my Cord; and all farewell.
 For having now my journey done,
 (Just at the setting of the Sun)
 Here I have found a Chamber fit,
 (God and good friends be thank’t for it)
 Where if I can a lodger be
 A little while from Tramp’lers free;
 At my up-rising next, I shall,
 If not requite, yet thank ye all.
 Meane while, the *Holy-Rood* hence fright

The fouler Fiend, and evill Spright,
From you or yours this night.

 ("On himselfe," H-306)

The force of the last three lines is that this symbol of Christ's death is functioning in a purely private way, almost as a familiar spirit or *Penates*, a household god to frighten away evil spirits. This is not exactly a throwback to traditional, popular religion: Herrick is not advocating the religious system of late-medieval religion. Rather, he is suggesting that its use is only applicable as a private source of meaning, legitimated by his "Chamber fit."

So far I have been arguing that Herrick's poetry was informed by the symbolic ambiguity associated with the "mistake" of idolatry and pagan religions, but I have not cited his explicitly "pagan" poems. The pagan poems are so obviously biased toward pagan notions of literary and artistic representation that it might appear that these poems are mere hyperbole. But I have been trying to argue that these poems are actually the norm for Herrick; they are typically the longest poems of his collection, the most complex, and, at the same time, the most explosively imagistic. These are the centerpieces of the *Hesperides*, though: they are so intricate and original that they are often taken to be parodies of sorts. They are indeed parodic, though, as I have suggested, parody for Herrick entailed the same kind of symbolic diminution and refinement that characterizes religious progress. Just as a religious representation can assume the requirements of sacrifice in pagan religions, so too Herrick's small forms—along with his idols and pagan gods—parody and at the same time suggest the refinement of the religious sensibility.

"The Welcome to Sack" (H-197) is a prime example of Herrick's tendency toward parody that slowly reveals its symbolic complexity. Herrick's "sack" is no fine Falernum wine, but he loads it with mythological and ritual significance throughout his poem dedicated

to it. He starts out as a penitent idol worshipper: “Why won’t my Saint confer / Favours on me, her fierce Idolater?” (lines 25–26). This is not really a slight to Catholic or ceremonialist worship so much as it is a miniaturizing of the stakes of such a comparison. Herrick is not asking us to see idol worship as analogous to worshipping wine; rather, he is asking us to see that the pleasure he takes in “sack” makes calling it a saint or an idol seem slightly ridiculous. Again, the symbolic significance of religious imagery is skewed by withholding the kind of parodic inversion that we would expect if the poet’s intent were explicitly moralistic. Instead, Herrick reveals that his status as sack’s “fierce Idolater” miniaturizes himself as well as the idol:

thy Iles shall lack
 Grapes, before *Herrick* leaves Canarie Sack.
 Thou mak’st me ayrie, active to be born,
 Like *Iphyclus*, upon the tops of Corn.
 Thou mak’st me nimble, as the winged howers,
 To dance and caper on the heads of flowers,
 And ridge the Sun-beams.

(lines 47–53)

The fact that Herrick enlists himself in the effects of sack is, I think, the salient point here. His appearance in the poem prevents the little things from signifying a kind of transcendence. The transport that sack produces is not ultimately divine but nor is it purely earthly, either. The small forms here are at once earthly and also mythical. And, lest we are tempted to identify the earthly pleasures of sack with a total absence of the divine, Herrick immediately goes on to set his own worship of “sack” in the context of other pagan deities of the earth:

Illustrious Idol! co’d th’ *Aegyptians* seek
 Help from the *Garlick*, *Onyon*, and the *Leek*,
 And pay no vowes to thee? who wast their best
 God, and far more transcendent then the rest?

(lines 57–60)

The “transcendent” epithet in the last line above has to be taken seriously as a real distinction between the values of certain kinds of pagan idols. Of course, we are far from the realm of transcendence, and we have just seen that the effect of this “transcendence” is actually to shrink Herrick himself down to the size of a fly dancing on the heads of flowers. But again, the effect is not of inverting the low and the high, but of seeing an immanent rather than transcendent scale of values *among* low things.

The sources Herrick used for his list of alliaceous vegetables provide a historical dimension to Herrick’s own poetic idolatry. He is purposefully conflating at least three sources when he writes of the Egyptians’ deification of garlic, onions, and leeks. Pliny the Elder writes in his *Natural History* that the Egyptians swore oaths on onions and garlic (19.35). Juvenal mocked the Egyptians for holding leeks and onions to be sacred: “porrum et caepe nefas violare et frangere morsu / (o sanctas gentes, quibus haec nascuntur in hortis / numina!)” (It’s a violation and a sin to crunch your teeth into a leek or an onion. Such holy peoples, to have these gods growing in their gardens!).³⁶³ Numbers 11:5 recounts the Israelites suffering in the wilderness, as they remember the plenty they enjoyed in Egypt: “We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick.” These two types of sources, the classical and the biblical, tell two, equally important stories that inform Herrick’s poem. In Juvenal’s poem, he mocks the Egyptians because they hold inviolate the onion while they feed on human flesh (*carnibus humanis vesci licet* [488]). Even more broadly, Juvenal’s point is that the human race has degenerated into barbarism and petty religious divisions since the time of the heroes, and we have literally become smaller: “terra malos homines nunc educat atque

³⁶³ Juvenal, *Satires*, ed. and trans. Susanna Morton Braund, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 488–89. Further references will appear in the text cited by page.

pusillos” (492) (Nowadays the earth produces humans who are nasty and puny). His poem ends up as a plea for compassion and understanding couched in terms of religious and social progress. Humans may have shrunk from their original size, but the subsequent refinements of sensibility and civilization ideally should have made us clement and peaceful. Juvenal’s pacifism has a point of contact in Herrick’s poem, along with the idea of humans shrinking. When sack makes Herrick himself shrink, it brings “love” into his life and presents his “*Genius*” with “blandishment” (55–56). But, Herrick writes, those who do not worship the sack are prone to violence, like “*Cassius*, that weak Water-drinker” (61). Juvenal ends with an appeal to Pythagoras, who abstained from eating meat and would not even eat every kind of bean. In Herrick’s poetry, beans, along with garlic, often signal a kind of contentedness with little. “One feeds on Lard, and yet is leane; / And I but feasting with a Beane, / Grow fat and smooth” (H-461). Elsewhere he laments his departure from his country home by writing to “Larr”: “No more shall I (I feare me) to thee bring / My chives of Garlick for an offering” (H-333). The vegetable worship of the Egyptians seems to signify, for Herrick, a pacifism that accompanies certain kinds of reductions: of size, of expectation, of social standing. But these reductions also resist the idea that as humans become small they become more violent, as Juvenal had suggested.

The biblical analogue in Herrick’s poem does something slightly different from the Juvenalian parallel. The leeks, onions, and garlic represent, for the Israelites in Numbers, the sensuous pleasures they enjoyed in Egypt. More generally, they represent the customs and traditions of pagan religion, which Exodus suggested might be adapted to Judaic religion. This notion that the customs of the pagans might be cleansed and made conformable to the Jews has an important resonance in Herrick’s poem. His poem implicitly poses the question

of how one goes about converting pagan traditions. What does it mean that “sack” joins the vegetables that the Egyptians worshipped and that the Israelites enjoyed in Egypt? It might be that this is how Herrick proposes to “convert” the sensuous pleasures of pagan traditions. He adds his own pleasures to the pleasures that the Israelites desired in the desert. Thus he suggests some continuity between his own desires and those of the Israelites, but he also leaps ahead to a time when those desires are fulfilled. Herrick himself enjoys his garlic, along with his wine. He suggests that the proper way to adapt pagan ceremonies might be to get creative with them. If they are, after all, only detractions of what were originally Hebraic anyway, to supplement them with your own traditions might be an acceptable way of interpreting them. And by his own reduction, shrinking to the size of a bee, Herrick implies that the symbolic mode of his interpretation of paganism is not one of theological inversion but of immanence. He does not allegorize the leeks, onion, and garlic—or his “sack”—but rather presents them as significant objects in a personalized scheme of religious history.

So, Herrick’s paganism here signifies how religious reduction encourages pacifism, and also how this manipulation of religious symbols can participate in a fulfillment of biblical religious history. But Herrick is suggesting that the end of the Christian tradition’s antagonism with pagan forms of religion might come from a redefinition of the very meaning of the “profane” world. If religious history is interpreted as a history of symbolic refinement (in a vaguely pagan way), then the “profane” is merely the repository of symbols that can potentially carry religious significance. Herrick’s miniatures demonstrate the artistic methodology by which he manipulates religious imagery, and thus makes his own religious symbolism.

III. Puppets and Profanity

The center of Herrick's religious-cum-pagan poetry, and one of Herrick's most sustained experiments with small forms, is his "The Fairie Temple: or, Oberons Chappell" (H-223). This poem is about a fairy religion that resembles pagan religion and a kind of Catholicism, even though ultimately it is neither. In form, it initially appears to resemble other "fairy" poems of the seventeenth century, such as Michael Drayton's *Nymphidia* (1627). But unlike Drayton's poem, Herrick's is explicitly and unavoidably *religious*. His fairies are not merely imps involved in amorous intrigue: they are idolaters, priests, congregants, and worshippers. The poem also encapsulates the way that the *Hesperides* portrays religion throughout its poems. The miniaturizing effects introduce an element of parody: to represent the materials of this hybrid fairy religion as tiny and almost powerless does suggest that this religion and its idols are inconsequential, perhaps false and even ridiculous. But at the same time that we perceive the parody we also perceive the efficacy of the little things and the intricacy of their rituals. This poem especially seems to imply that, for Herrick, the union of the small natural forms and the power of their symbolism represents the continued, if blunted, power of the rituals that the poem parodies.

As Herrick writes of the fairies, "Theirs is a mixt Religion. / And some have heard the Elves it call / Part Pagan, part Papisticall" (lines 23–25). In 1648, these lines might have seemed to be a familiar way to denigrate Laudian religion and the Anglican Church, as either overly pagan or overly Catholic, or simply both. Even if Herrick wrote it in the 1620s the lines would have had at least a little polemical complexity. The lines also take on parodic complexity: they could be setting up a criticism of the Catholic church, the Anglican church, or they could be parodying the mockery of those churches. Such complexity necessitates that

we take Herrick's fairy religion as a new kind of thing, or at least that we acknowledge the difficulties of pinning it to one particular religious or ecclesiastical tradition.

So, when Herrick begins his poem with the various idols that the fairies worship, he is actually using idolatry to do several things at once. The passage describes the "Halcion's curious nest" (line 4),

Into the which who looks shall see
His *Temple of Idolatry*:
Where he of *God-heads* has such store,
As *Rome's Pantheon* had not more.
His house of *Rimmon*, this he calls,
Girt with small bones, instead of walls.
First, in a *Neech*, more black than jet,
His Idol-Cricket there is set:
Then in a Polisht Ovall by
There stands his *Idol-Beetle-flie*:
Next in an Arch, akin to this,
His *Idol-Canker* seated is:
Then in a Round, is plac't by there,
His golden god, *Cantharides*.
(lines 5–18)

The idolatry in the temple is meant to be ridiculous but it is also meant to reveal something important about what idolatry *does* and how it works. Herrick may not have been thinking about Vossius or Selden explicitly when he wrote this, but the idolatry in his poetic temple does something similar to the scholarly accounts. First of all, there is the chronological ambiguity, which underscores the way that paganism has borrowed from Judaism and then how Christians borrowed from pagans. The temple is called "*Rimmon*" after an idol temple in 2 Kings 5:18, by which Herrick recalls the proximity of pagans and Israelites, and the occasional forays into polytheism *by* the Israelites, in the Old Testament. But the temple is also somewhat like the Roman Pantheon, a pagan temple that was converted to Christian uses. There is a clear historical dimension to the idolatry in the fairy temple, which

emphasizes the continual negotiations between pagans, Jews, and Christians throughout history.

Herrick's "*Temple of Idolatry*" also shows off the logic of idolatry, which functions by multiplying images and essences in a process of simultaneous rupture and investment of divine signification. Idols rupture the divine by dividing it into parts, here various insects that live in the tree that has momentarily become a fairy temple. But idols also invest meaning in natural objects, typically in objects that serve some purpose in themselves and do not signify merely because they are symbols. As Vossius argued, an idol was part of a "proper" mode of worship; it was worshipped because it was thought that the idol itself had something divine in it. But Herrick, by making his idols purposefully low and ridiculous, reveals something essential about idols: they recognize the function of various parts of nature or the cosmos. Of course, idolaters arrive at this recognition of function through a mistake, by transferring God's power into the created world. The idols, though, are doing in essence the same thing that Herrick's poetry is doing. They divide and most importantly reduce the forms of the natural world in order to privilege some things, in some situations, over others. This is the ingenuity of Herrick's "paganism," that he can use the logic of idolatry to show how defunct or "false" religious traditions retain their power even when reduced to near insignificance.

Herrick's list of saints pushes what might have been a standard Protestant critique of Catholicism to its absurd conclusion, wherein the Catholic saints appear smaller and smaller, but permeate more and more of the world:

Saint *Will o'th'Wisp*e (of no great bignes)
But *alias* call'd here *Fatuus ignis*.
Saint *Frip*, Saint *Trip*, Saint *Fill*, Saint *Fillie*,
Neither those other-Saint-ships will I
Here goe about for to recite
Their number (almost) infinite,

Which one by one here set downe are
In this most curious Calendar.
(lines 30–37)

The Protestant critique, that Catholics, like pagans, can make a saint out of anything, is taken to its absolute limit as the saints become “(almost) infinite,” seemingly in proportion to their reduction in size. The result of this critique, Herrick implies, is to define the fairy religion, or Catholicism or paganism, as coterminous with the mystical forces of nature itself and the popular beliefs therein. It is a reduction that turns into a kind of expansion, a dispersal of the power of invoking the saints back into the natural world, as if taking seriously the Protestant idea that the saints were mere idols to begin with. By 1648, the association of the spirits of “popular” or “traditional” religion with paganism and Catholicism would have seemed a very worn-out trope indeed. Amidst the waning of popular beliefs, though, Herrick does something different: his spirits are tiny, artistic miniatures, whose small size indicates their reduction in importance and influence among sophisticated readers. Herrick again resists making his fairy saints symbols of a unified, plenistic cosmos in which religious signification matched up with the mystical forces of the natural world. There is real loss here: Herrick’s poem implies that if we really want to argue that paganism and Catholicism are sympathetic, then the Protestant animus against them both threatens to destroy, or maybe has already destroyed the possibility of a one-to-one correspondence between natural objects of devotion and the assignment of divine significance to them. Surely this is what Herrick’s small forms are attempting to correct, by substituting an artificial symbolic system, wherein small forms stand for religious progress though not religious integration, for a system of purely natural, magical symbols.

But Herrick did not want to imply that Protestantism should become more Catholic (or more pagan!). Rather, he is doing something else, creating a new mixture of religions by miniaturizing the paraphernalia of other religions. In the next section of the poem, this religion begins to emphasize the role of *artifice* in religion, an idea latent in the idolatry that is so prominent in the fairy religion. This artifice takes the form of a “puppet-priest”:

First, at the entrance of the gate,
A little-Puppet-Priest doth wait,
Who squeaks to all the commers there,
Favour your tongues, who enter here.
Pure hands bring hither, without staine.
A second pules, *Hence, hence, profane.*
(lines 38–43)

This is the only instance of the word “puppet” in Herrick’s poetry, but it comes in a very important place and it signals a highly charged concept. Herrick’s puppet acts as a guard against another important word for Herrick: the “profane.” The lines he quotes belong to Horace, signaling the boundaries of an esoteric religious space, which seems odd after the poet has noted the dispersal of the fairy saints throughout the natural world. But the puppet priest represents a hidden power in the fairy’s religion, one not readily apparent to the uninitiated. This power depends on the distinctions that ritual observance creates; indeed, the power may represent *only* the idea of ritual boundary, the idea that the division between esoteric and exoteric forms of religion imparts power to religion. And this is what Herrick’s poem is all about, the way that a ridiculous, obscure, and manifestly “false” religion maintains its force by creating ever smaller divisions and distinctions. Herrick’s “puppet priest” represents the possibility that this kind of symbolic reduction of religious forms can actually mitigate religious conflict—by couching all religious distinctions as artificial,

contingent, circumstantial negotiations—and that they should be treated as the fanciful creations that they are.

As Herrick's use suggests, the "puppet" had significant religious connotations in the seventeenth century, often as a term of abuse directed toward supposed idols or the trappings of ceremonial religion. The "puppet" made manifest many things that writers criticized about pagan religion, or pagan-influenced Christian religions. For one thing, the puppet implies a human, not divine, source of movement and control. This is why Henry Burton could compare church ceremonies to a mere "Puppet-play" in his *Replie to a Relation* of 1640.³⁶⁴ In a common polemical gesture, he suggests that ancient pagans saw in their puppet idols a representation of divinity, while modern Catholics and other ceremonialists give the "same honour to the Image, which is due to that, which it representeth."³⁶⁵ Linking puppets to images as a source of representational confusion was not at all uncommon in the 1640s, especially for critics of Laud. William Prynne's account of Laud's prosecution includes a story (unconfirmed, though that scarcely matters) about someone who took offence to the painted windows in his parish. The glass depicted the biblical creation story, but the painter had also depicted "God the Father, in form of a little old man clad in a blew and red coat, with a pouch by his side, about the bignesse of a Puppet."³⁶⁶ So, for Prynne one of the malign meanings of the religious puppet is its size; painting God, or confining him in any kind of representation, is a kind of reduction of his power or even his essence. This reduction also leads to the misconception of what is and is not a representation, just as Burton had argued.

³⁶⁴ Burton, *A Replie to a Relation, of the Conference between William Laude and Mr. Fisher the Jesuite* (London, 1640), 105.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 337.

³⁶⁶ Prynne, *Canterburies Doome, or, the First Part of a Compleat History of the Commitment, Charge, Tryall, Condemnation, Execution of William Laud, Late Arch-bishop of Canterbury* (London, 1646), 102.

Prynne's story includes old women making "low curtesies" before what they took to be "God the Father in the Glasse window." But Prynne returns to his principal complaint, which is that the image of God in the window somehow reduces God, and that this reduction in size accompanies a reduction in power. But why should the size of the image matter for Prynne? He seems to concede at least a little to the power of images and representations: "For how can God a most pure spirit, whom man never saw, he expressed by a grosse body, or visible similitude? or how can the infinite Majesty and greatnesse of God incomprehensible to mans minde, much more not able to be compassed with the sense, be expressed in a smal and little image?"³⁶⁷ Would a larger image have been more appropriate, or does a concern for the propriety of images enter into Prynne's argument at all? I would suggest that yes, it does, at least on some level; the puppet's size is important because the symbolic reduction of God's image is the parallel of the ceremonialist's argument for making certain times and places sacred while some are not. This process of ritualistic worship was, in the eyes of Prynne, an unacceptable reduction of God's essence.

In a related sense, puppets were implicated in ongoing debates about obscenity and profanity, debates that also commonly invoked pagan religions. In a sermon published in 1641, Cornelius Burges links "puppet Gods" to "abominable" idols, and goes further to link "idolatry and adultery."³⁶⁸ This meaning of puppet, along with the abuse of the word "abominable," had survived apparently unscathed from Ben Jonson's dismantling of it in his *Bartholomew Fair* in 1614. The scene of debate between Zeal-of-the-land Busy and the puppet pretty obviously inspired Herrick, even down to his puppet priest invoking the "profane," an epithet that Busy applies to the "Puppet Dionysius." After the puppet show in

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Burges, *The First Sermon, Preached to the Honourable House of Commons* (London, 1641), 12.

act 5, Busy thunders, “Down with Dagon, down with Dagon! ’Tis I will no longer endure your profanations.”³⁶⁹ One of the purposes of the exchange between the puppet and the Puritan is to redefine what “profane” means. Busy calls on his “zeal” to “fill me, fill me, that is, make me full” (5.5.39). Winwife comments, “What a desperate, profane wretch is this!” (40). Busy and the puppet then have an absurd back-and-forth argument about whether the puppet’s “profession is profane”: “It is not profane!”, “It is profane”; “It is not profane;” and so on they go (59–65). Busy’s (eventual) argument is that the puppets mix male and female clothing and are thus somehow profane. But as the puppet replies,

It is your old stale argument against the players, but it will not hold against the puppets; for we have neither male nor female amongst us. And that thou may’st see, if thou wilt, like a malicious purblind zeal as thou art!

The puppet takes up his garment.
(91–94)

So, the puppet’s confutation of Busy does two things. It makes the accusation of “profanity” almost meaninglessness, since the term seems to have no real meaning outside Busy’s own mind. And besides, Winwife’s imputation of “profanity” to Busy suggests that true profanity might have more to do with social decorum and propriety than with religious distinctions of good and evil. Secondly, the puppet lifting up his clothing signifies the absurdity of religious zeal directed against idols, but especially against artistic representations such as the puppet himself. The “puppet,” for Jonson, was not a good analogue for false worship or obscenity, because the puppet itself represented both the insignificance but also the potential transformative power of art. That the puppet’s art resembles the Puritan’s inspiration suggests that the idea of the “puppet” served to upset religious distinctions by throwing those distinctions into the indeterminate realm of artistic manipulation.

³⁶⁹ Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, ed. Eugene M. Waith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 5.5.1–2. Further references will appear in the text, cited by act, scene, and line.

Jason P. Rosenblatt and Winfried Schleiner argue something similar when they examine this scene in terms of Jonson's exchange with John Selden about cross-dressing gods in antiquity and in the bible. In Jonson's rebuke to Busy via the puppet, the puppet appears not as a pagan idol but as something almost beneath the moralistic distinctions that the word "pagan" would imply. As Rosenblatt and Schleiner note, "Although the puppet uses religious rhetoric ('we have neither male nor female amongst us'), it does not transcend sex but rather is beneath it."³⁷⁰ The puppet is not obscene or profane: rather, its apparent similarity to Busy's "inspiration" makes the whole concept of inspiration seem more than a little akin to simple ventriloquism or mechanical manipulation. The puppet also seems, at least for Selden, to redefine the meaning of the "profane." In his *Table Talk*, Selden remarks on the back-and-forth "debate" between Busy and the puppet over whether puppetry is profane: for Selden, the back and forth shows that religious disputes of sacred and profane "will never be ended, because there wants a measure by which the business should be decided."³⁷¹ I would argue that Jonson and Selden are both interested in redefining the force of the term "profane," associating it as they do with puppets and Puritans. And indeed, in their account puppets and Puritans are similar because neither one is in control of their actions: the Puritan misattributes his inspiration to God when really he is being guided by his own desires. This is perhaps why Jonson and Selden wanted to take the "profane" appellation out of the hands of the clerics as a potential tool for making religious distinctions. And the puppet helps Jonson to show the essential absurdity of calling an object profane.

³⁷⁰ Rosenblatt and Schleiner, "John Selden's Letter to Ben Jonson on Cross-Dressing and Bisexual Gods," *English Literary Renaissance* 29 (1999): 50.

³⁷¹ Qtd. in Rosenblatt and Schleiner, "John Selden's Letter to Ben Jonson," 51.

But Jonson does not let the puppet or the puppeteers escape criticism. As Rosenblatt and Schleiner note, one MS variant of Selden's *Table Talk* shows Selden misremembering the debate in *Bartholomew Fair* as "Inigo Lanthorne disputing with his puppet."³⁷² This indicates that Jonson was, among other things, also trying to associate his then enemy Inigo Jones with puppetry as a mechanical art. Here is yet another meaning of puppets, as mechanical devices that had the potential to mislead and distract those not attuned to the artificial motions. Indeed, Jonson had criticized Inigo Jones's theatrical machinations as "puppets," which mirror the unreliability and inconstancy of Jones's character.³⁷³ Jonson's fear drew on claims being made about mechanical devices in early modern England, especially that they might be able to mimic natural motions. This mimetic power might even be used, as one sixteenth-century author boasted, to "keep the 'common people' in awe."³⁷⁴ The puppet in *Bartholomew Fair* is thus intended as a critique of two things at once. Its ventriloquism aligns with the inspiration of the Puritan as a way to deflate the pretensions of the religiously inspired, implying that they are no more than puppets to their own zeal. But the puppet's disrobing itself also functions as a criticism of the hidden arts of theater and religion: the unveiling of its nether regions could symbolize the hollowness of theatrical and religious deceptions, which have the potential to deceive the credulous and the zealous alike.

Mechanical mimicry could thus enforce religious distinctions between the incredulous multitude and learned initiates. But Jonson was altering a tradition of associating puppets with exactly the kind of thing that *Busy* was indicting. The Greek satirist Lucian had

³⁷² Ibid., 51n13.

³⁷³ See Jessica Wolfe, *Humanism, Machinery, and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 122.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 63.

made the orgies of Dionysius in ancient Syria famous for featuring automata, self-moving puppets that played a part in the god's ritualistic festivities. These puppets were specifically designed to *emphasize* their pudenda. Lucian writes, "The Greeks erect phalli for Dionysius, upon which they mount the following sort of thing: little wooden men with large penises. They call these *neurospasta*."³⁷⁵ One can find a similar description of the *neurospasta* [literally "things moved by strings"] in Herodotus:

For the manner of *Greece* is in this banquet to weare about their neckes the similitude of a mans yard named *Phallum*, wrought and carued of figtree, in stead whereof, the *Aegyptians* haue deuised small images of two cubites long, whiche by meanes of certayne strings and coardes they cause to mooue and stirre as if they had sence and were liuing.³⁷⁶

In the ancient writers, the puppets were associated specifically with the worship of the phallus during the festival of Dionysius. But the principle involved in the use of puppets in religious worship seems to be the same for the ancients as for Jonson. The logic of the puppet is one of substitution. Herodotus is explicit about this: the Egyptians substitute the puppets "in stead" of the stationary phallus. The puppet is designed to mimic life; the reason to use puppets in religious worship is, on some level, so that real people would not have to be used. The puppet takes on the requirements of religious devotion while remaining a simulacrum, an object invested with significance as a symbolic stand-in.

While Jonson dispenses with the large genitalia, the rationale is similar in *Bartholomew Fair*. The puppet show is art at its purest, art that declares itself as art and yet invites the investment of symbolic meaning; and the puppet is a kind of blank upon which the community and the spectators can put whatever they want. In 1642 the philosopher Henry

³⁷⁵ Lucian, *On the Syrian Goddess*, ed. and trans. J. L. Lightfoot (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 257 (chap. 16).

³⁷⁶ Herodotus, *The Famous Hystory of Herodotus*, trans. B. R. [Barnaby Rich?] (London, 1584), fol. 83r (book 2, chap. 48).

More defined the Greek word *Neurospast* as “a Puppet or any Machina that’s moved by an unseen string or nerve.”³⁷⁷ The “neurospast” is simply the “outward form” of the body, that which depends on the “soul” to animate it.³⁷⁸ Essentially an empty husk, the puppet nevertheless can become the vessel for various kinds of religious devotion, depending on what soul pulls its strings. A religious puppet points out the instrumental nature of religious devotion, opposed to the idea that religious devotion proceeds from inspiration or zeal: for so many both in the ancient world and in the seventeenth century, a puppet is a religious machine.

Returning to Herrick’s poem with this complex history in mind, we can see that Herrick is drawing on the various connotations of the “puppet” in the seventeenth century while also supplementing them to suit his purposes. Herrick follows Jonson in associating his “puppet-priest” with a conception of the “profane” that is more purely classical than it is Christian. (“*Hence, hence profane,*” says Herrick’s puppet, quoting Horace.) The classical idea of the “profane” did not necessarily connote something “evil” so much as something uninitiated, appropriate for the vulgar people. The fairy religion is more interested in esoteric and exoteric distinctions than it is in distinctions of true and false or good and bad. Furthermore, the manifest absurdity and miniaturized proportions of the fairy rites makes it seem that any real distinction of sacred and profane being made in the poem is in the process of disintegrating. If the fairies stand for traditional Catholicism, then its standard of sacredness is rapidly losing its force. The esoteric secrets of the fairy religion appear thoroughly ridiculous from an outside perspective, as the rest of the poem goes on to relate the details of the fairies’ worship:

³⁷⁷ More, *Psychodia Platonica, or, A Platonicall Song of the Soul* (Cambridge, 1642), sig. Q3v.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

Hard by, i'th'shell of halfe a nut,
 The Holy-water there is put:
 A little brush of Squirrils haire,
 (Compos'd of odde, not even paires)
 Stands in the Platter, or close by,
 To purge the Fairie Family.
 Neere to the Altar stands the Priest,
 There off'ring up the Holy-Grist:
 Ducking in Mood, and perfect Tense,
 With (much-good-do't him) reverence.
 (lines 44–53)

The fairies' worship is full of odds and ends of the Christian, mainly Catholic, liturgy and ceremonies. Their altar is made of a "Transverce bone" (line 57), whose "Linnen-Drapery is a then / Subtile and ductile Codlin's skin" (lines 60–61). There is a "*Fairie-Psalter*, / Grac't with the Trout-flies curious wings" (lines 71–72). The logic again is one of puppetry: traditional, quasi-magical religious rituals are undergoing a process of substitution that reduces them to fairy rituals. Herrick is showing us the strings, here: the rituals are being revealed as ridiculous just as Jonson's Puppet Dionysius revealed Busy's screeching accusations of "profanity" to be mere words hurled at an inanimate object.

But unlike Jonson, Herrick does not seem as dismissive of the significance of the puppet itself. Like Jonson, he wants to redefine the nature of the "profane" back to its classical sense, which preserved the social distinction of initiated versus uninitiated. Herrick, though, pushes this idea even further. For Jonson "profanity" seemed to be more properly social than religious: Busy is a "profane" wretch because he lacks decorum. Herrick's "puppet-priest" invokes the profane as a religious concept that depends on ritual actions that are manifestly ridiculous, parodies of Catholic practices. The point of Jonson's puppet debate was to debunk "inspired," overly personal religion in favor of communally oriented religion; and while Herrick's poetry is perhaps also arguing for a more communal religion, part of the

effect of his puppet-priest and his mysteries is to demonstrate where the esoteric mystery religion has ended up. If we assume, rightly I think, that the content of the fairy religion is inconsequential, then the form certainly is not; and the fairies do seem to have a sense of decorum, charity, and duty. For while their rites are ridiculous, they are performed with care:

No, we must know, the Elves are led
Right by the Rubrick, which they read.
They have their Text for what they doe;
I, and their Book of Canons too.
And, as Sir *Thomas Parson* tells,
They have their Book of Homilies:
And other Scriptures, that designe
A short, but righteous discipline.
The Bason stands the board upon
To take the Free-Oblation:
A little Pin-dust: which they hold
More precious, then we prize our gold:
Which charity they give to many
Poore of the Parish, (if there's any).
(lines 74–90)

Herrick's fairly religion is an esoteric religion, but one whose esotericism does not much *matter* in the traditional sense. This poem is recounting, or maybe summing up, the decline of esoteric, ritualistic religions; what *does* matter here is the form of the fairies' worship, how it reflects "righteous discipline," a concept that does not seem to be subject to parody. If all the miniaturized parodies of ritualistic religion are making an argument, it is that esoteric religion as such, a religion that contains some element of hidden or partially revealed mysteries, is increasingly available only as a series of culturally significant symbols. Herrick's poem is at least partially a critique of Catholic rituals, but the critique seems half-hearted: this religion is merely little and silly rather than evil or malicious. The fairies have

Their *Holy Oyle*, their *Fasting-Spittle*,
Their *sacred Salt* here, (not a little.)
Dry *chips*, old *shoes*, *rags*, *grease*, and *bones*;
Beside their *Fumigations*.

(lines 117–20)

The traditional fairy spirits are being asked to take on the significance of spiritual forms that were rapidly losing their ability to make meaning.

Thus, the materials of the fairy worship have become symbols of religious decline, the realignment of religious meaning toward formal practice on the one hand and internal, private belief on the other. For one wants to ask: what, for the fairies, would count as “profane?” The “sacred” in this poem is practically meaningless, associated with the small forms of the fairy religion and not capable of producing any real distinctions. The profane would thus seem to signify the human world, or at least the world outside the micro-realm of the fairies. As much as this is something of a joke for Herrick, there is still a sense in which he is tapping into a trend in religious thought of the middle of the seventeenth century and beyond. Herrick, like Jonson, wanted to mock the simplistic, accusatory connotations that the term “profane” had taken on during the lengthy religious polemics of the past hundred years.

Yet it was also clear that this accusatory tone had been a near-constant of Christian/pagan polemic, at least since the early church. Even Eusebius in his *Preparation for the Gospel* sounds a bit like “rabbi Busy”:

For I am not going to be frightened by the arrogant voice which said, ‘I speak to those who lawfully may hear: / Depart, all ye profane, and close the doors.’ Not we at all events are profane, but those who declaimed that such foul and unseemly legends about beetles and brute beasts were the thoughts of a wise theology—they who, according to the admirable Apostle, ‘professing themselves to be wise, became fools,’ seeing that they ‘changed the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.’³⁷⁹

Eusebius is trying to redefine the meaning of “profane” from something denoting initiation and esotericism to something denoting the malicious misinterpretation of divinity. And

³⁷⁹ Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel*, trans. Gifford, 1:128–29. Eusebius’s citation of Romans 1:22–23 became a commonplace criticism of paganism (Selden cites it approvingly in *De Diis Syris*, 2:230).

Eusebius was successful indeed: his definition still formed the basis for religious debate when Jonson and Herrick wrote their plays and poems.

But Jonson and Herrick were a part of the generation that began to change the terms of this debate. For a sense of how Herrick played with notions of the sacred and the profane, we should turn briefly to his *Noble Numbers*. Of crucial importance is his epigraph, from Hesiod's *Theogony*, spoken by the shepherds of the wilderness: "We know how to say many things that bear the guise of truth, and we also know when we intend to state the truth."³⁸⁰ As I suggested at the outset, the *Hesperides* is interested in the implications of Prometheus's deception of Zeus in the *Theogony*: the entire collection is a celebration of artistic manipulation, especially of size and shape. The *Noble Numbers* is thus Herrick's attempt to "state the truth," as Hesiod's shepherds say. And what does the "truth" of the *Noble Numbers* look like? Herrick's pious pieces describe a God who is beyond knowing, access to whom is limited to specific times and places, and even then the access is fleeting: "God is above the sphere of our esteem, / And is the best known, not defining Him" (N-4). Access to God does seem to be granted in specific moments of ritual celebration, though. In "Another New-yeeres Gift, or Song for the Circumcision" (N-98), Herrick begins by distinguishing sacred from "profane" in the classical sense of the uninitiated:

Hence, hence profane, and none appeare
With any thing unhallowed, here:
No jot of Leven must be found
Conceal'd in this most holy Ground.
(lines 1–4)

However, when Herrick is not participating in sacred rituals, the "profane" seems to be something not only foreign to God but also evil and unclean as well. In "To God" (N-113) he writes,

³⁸⁰ The translation is Patrick's, on page 449 of his edition.

Pardon me God, (once more I Thee intreat)
That I have plac'd Thee in so meane a seat,
Where round about Thou seest but all things vaine,
Uncircumcis'd, unseason'd, and prophane.
But as Heavens publike and immortall Eye
Looks on the filth, but is not soil'd thereby;
So Thou, my God, may'st on this impure look,
But take no tincture from my sinfull Book.

These two definitions of the profane are both in play in the *Noble Numbers*, but the classical sense seems to govern access to the divine, or the transcendental sacred. While the profane might be impure to God, Herrick at the same time identifies it with the quotidian world outside of sacred rituals.

One finds this ambivalence in Herrick because the nature of the profane was in flux. In *Hesperides*, as we have seen, the “profane” is refracted through levels of religious parody, symbolic reduction, and artistic manipulation of religious images. So it makes sense that in *Noble Numbers* Herrick shows us the consequences of his expansion of the realm of the profane into the realm of the religious. As a result of this expansion, the “sacred” is only accessible at particular moments, but is all the more powerful and significant for that. In fact, this concept of the sacred seems so usual for us that it is easy to miss how unusual it might have seemed in the seventeenth century.

Scholarship on Herrick relies on distinctions between sacred and profane, but only rarely does it reflect on their provenance. For example, in an article that is not often cited by scholars of Herrick, Frances P. Malpezzi proposes that Herrick's concept of the sacred can be understood by comparing it to that of the twentieth-century religious thinker Mircea Eliade. Malpezzi argues that in some of the longer poems of *Noble Numbers*, “Herrick leads his audience through an active, participatory meditation.” The ritual event “transcends time,” and thus accesses what Eliade calls “sacred time.” He quotes Eliade's explanation of the logic of

religious festivities: “The participants in the festival become contemporaries of the mythical event. In other words, they emerge from their historical time—that is, from the time constituted by the sum total of profane personal and intrapersonal events—and recover primordial time, which is always the same, which belongs to eternity.”³⁸¹ What I find so interesting about Malpezzi’s collocation of Herrick and Eliade is that Malpezzi’s argument actually *makes sense* and is not as anachronistic as it appears to be at first glance. As Jonathan Sheehan has argued, what most people meant by “profane” in the seventeenth century is not what Eliade would have understood by that term. Even in the passage quoted above, Eliade uses “profane” to mean something like everyday life, “personal and intrapersonal events.” But early moderns usually understood the “profane” not as something theologically neutral but as something theologically evil or impure, and certainly antithetical to the divine.³⁸² Even so, one can actually find the more modern meaning of “profane” in Herrick’s poetry, both in *Hesperides* and *Noble Numbers*.

Herrick’s poetry can thus help us to see how art can change religion, and vice versa. Herrick found in pagan religion and pagan culture in general a way of creating religious meaning that diverged significantly from the Christian tradition. He was no allegorist: he did not share a faith in any kind of sweeping allegorical synthesis of pagan and Christian religions via symbolic interpretations. Herrick’s “symbols” signified in much the same way that Selden described in his *De Diis Syris*, in which the pagan symbols function as representations of divinity but then become significant objects in their own right. Similarly, Herrick’s symbols, his religious objects, are marked by their reductions: in size and in power.

³⁸¹ Malpezzi, “The Feast of the Circumcision: The Return to Sacred Time in Herrick’s *Noble Numbers*,” *Notre Dame English Journal* 14, no. 1 (1981): 29.

³⁸² See Sheehan, “Sacred and Profane,” 35–37.

His fairy religion in particular is an enclosed religious system unto itself, a religion that nevertheless gets its structure from real-world religions. But the small things of the fairy religion, by virtue of their absurdity and the obvious fact of their fabrication, provide a model for religion in Herrick's own time. The violent debates, and the physical violence as well, of seventeenth century religion have little effect on the enclosed religion of the *Hesperides*. By constantly refining and shrinking the contentious objects of religion, Herrick mimics the movement he found in pagan religion of increasing division, multiplication of significant objects, and symbolic sophistication. This is how ancient religion becomes modern once again in the seventeenth century: people like Herrick were finding that a religion of blunt and obvious fictions could reduce the necessity for religious strife.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: The Poetry of False Religion and the Religion of the Secular World

In many ways, this project has looked forward to a crucial figure in the history of religious thought: Giambattista Vico, author the *The New Science*. Vico thought that pagan theologies provided the inevitable starting point for any investigation of religion. The reason was that paganism lifted the veil of religious mystery and revealed what Christians denied was the truth: namely, that all religions were “poetic” creations. They were born of “poetic metaphysics,” they developed through “poetic logic,” and they culminate in “poetic politics.” These are of course *his* terms in book 2 of *The New Science*, which itself is called “Poetic Wisdom.”³⁸³ The impetus of Vico’s project came from his feeling that the world lacked a truly social history of religion and of the effects of God’s providence. “The philosophers,” he writes, “have not yet contemplated His providence in respect of that part of it which is most proper to men, whose nature has this principal property: that of being social” (3). Vico is attempting a “rational civil theology of divine providence” (4), the basis of which is “poetic wisdom” (6). Furthermore, the “knowledge of the theological poets” forms a way to discover “the first true origins of the institutions of the historic time” (6). By wedding philosophy to philology, Vico purports to discover something like a history of knowledge, based on “authority.” Vico is arguing for a reinterpretation of the poetry and “fables” of the pagans,

³⁸³ Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), 107–297. I will cite Vico’s book from this edition parenthetically in the text by page.

and as he ultimately concludes: “the fables were true and trustworthy histories of the customs of the most ancient peoples of Greece” (ibid.).

All of this seems respectable to us. We are still interested in the religious origins of human civilization, and the first religions do indeed appear to be polytheistic, just as Vico and David Hume thought they were.³⁸⁴ Only recently, archaeologists unearthed new evidence about the earliest religious societies in modern Turkey. As an article in a 2011 issue of *National Geographic* sums up the findings at the ruins of Göbekli Tepe, “We used to think agriculture gave rise to cities and later to writing, art, and religion. Now the world’s oldest temple suggests the urge to worship sparked civilization.”³⁸⁵ The religious temples of Göbekli Tepe are much older than the surrounding remains of agricultural development; this suggests that the site drew in people from the surrounding area and led to the necessity of feeding this religious community, and hence of the development of agriculture. This formulation reflects the similar urgency of Vico’s project. He too wanted to know the origin of the arts and their relationship to religion and human development. But it is important to note that the more recent way of thinking about religion owes much to Vico’s idea that religions develop in purely social and natural ways, and that the human understanding of the divine as something beyond this world always nevertheless has consequences for how institutions develop in this world.

So, Vico looked to paganism for his study because it was a religion that developed in purely social and natural ways. But his view of paganism was the product of the long history of Christian attempts to understand the relationship between paganism and the Judeo-

³⁸⁴ For Hume’s assertion, see *The Natural History of Religion* (1757), ed. John M. Robertson (London, 1889), chap.1, “That Polytheism Was the Primary Religion of Men.”

³⁸⁵ Charles C. Mann, “The Birth of Religion,” *National Geographic* 219, no. 6 (2011): 34–59, at 34.

Christian religious tradition. My dissertation has been an attempt to trace only the very last part of that history, in which paganism as a “false religion” began to be decoupled from the revealed religion that made it appear as “false” in the first place. And indeed there was one signal event that can provide a perspective on how this decoupling was taking place in the seventeenth century.

John Spencer (1630–93) was, in his lifetime, a respected but little-known scholar of Hebraic religions at Cambridge. In 1685 he published a lengthy and difficult text with the innocuous sounding title of *De Legibus Hebraeorum Ritualibus et Earum Rationibus Libri Tres* (On the Ritual Laws of the Hebrews and their Rationales, in three books). John Spencer, though, has been credited with reversing the Hebraic precedence of pagan religions, arguing instead that God adapted the rituals of pagan Egypt for the uneducated and wandering Israelites after their exodus. He states his premise very clearly; he is setting out to prove that “Deum ritus aliquos inter Gentes olim usitatos in Legem cultumque suum transtulisse. . . . Ritus autem inter Gentes usitatos ullis Hebraeorum institutis ansam dedisse (God transferred into the law some of the rites and worship that were once in use among the Gentiles. . . . And these rites provided the occasion for similar ones set up by the Hebrews.)³⁸⁶ This argument is itself an adaptation of Maimonides’ argument that God’s ritual laws are rational, done for the specific purpose of turning the Israelites from idolatry. Spencer makes much the same point, with the Christian caveat, against Maimonides’ insistence on the eternal duration of the laws, that the force of the laws is also adaptable.³⁸⁷ But this is precisely why Spencer’s book is so

³⁸⁶ Spencer, *De Legibus Hebraeorum Ritualibus et Earum Rationibus Libri Tres* (Cambridge, 1685), 521 (my translation).

³⁸⁷ See Fausto Parente, “Spencer, Maimonides, and the History of Religion,” in *History of Scholarship: A Selection of Papers from the Seminar on the History of Scholarship Held Annually at the Warburg Institute*, ed. C. R. Ligota, and Jean-Louis Quantin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 280–81; Guy G. Stroumsa, “John Spencer and the Roots of Idolatry,” *History of Religions* 41 (2001): 1–23; Stroumsa, *A New Science: The*

important. It suggests that God is a historical actor, and the laws that he adapted for the Hebrews were themselves not eternal (the crucial distinction set up by Maimonides) but contingent, set up for a rapidly changing historical situation. Spencer's God is cunning, and, ultimately, his laws are capable of being understood by human reason; if only human reason looks to history it can detect how God works in time, and it can adapt social needs to historically rooted divine revelations. Spencer was thus part of a long-standing dialogue about God's accommodation of his truths to man.³⁸⁸

The doctrine of accommodation that Spencer invoked and deployed had immense implications for the culture of the late seventeenth century, extending even to Vico's new science.³⁸⁹ For one thing, it resonated with some of the radical theological currents of the seventeenth century, especially Socinianism. Spencer himself was rumored to have Socinian sympathies, having received in his rooms in Cambridge a noted adherent to this kind of theology.³⁹⁰ And as Sarah Mortimer has argued, Socinianism was fundamental to much of the religious turmoil in England surrounding the civil wars and even beyond.³⁹¹ It was

Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 95–100; and Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: the Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 69–79.

³⁸⁸ On this importance of theological “accommodation” for the historical understanding of religions, see especially Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 240–55. See also (Funkenstein's student) Stephen D. Benin, “The ‘Cunning of God’ and Divine Accommodation,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45 (1984): 179–91; as well as Jonathan Elukin, “Maimonides and the Rise and Fall of the Sabians: Explaining Mosaic Laws and the Limits of Scholarship,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63 (2002): 619–37; and Abraham Socher, “Funkenstein on the Theological Origins of Historicism: A Critical Note,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67 (2006): 401–8.

³⁸⁹ For Vico's use of the idea of accommodation via Eusebius and Augustine, see Mark Lilla, *G. B. Vico: The Making of an Anti-Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 148–50.

³⁹⁰ Parente, “Spencer, Maimonides, and the History of Religion,” in *History of Scholarship*, ed. Ligota and Quantin, 299–301.

³⁹¹ For my summary of Socinianism that follows, see Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 13–38.

stridently anti-Trinitarian, arguing for God's singular action. Even more importantly, its adherents argued that God's actions have to be interpreted rationally, in quasi-legalistic terms as a series of shifting covenants with humanity. Socinianism granted human societies a good deal of autonomy in deciding the calibration of divine law and human agency that would structure a particular society. It said, humans are endowed with reason, and while God does help us by revelation, those revelations have to be interpreted through human institutions, which also change and develop through time. This theology could seem radically subversive to church authority, but it also seemed to support political authority. By denying the all-encompassing efficacy of the internal light of God for each individual, Socinianism threw the burden of interpretation on human institutions as a rationally derived and changing set of customs and values.

So where does the Socinian triangulation between God, reason, and history leave the inheritance of pagan literature and culture in the Christian world? On one level, it reminds us that the provenance of the arts was up for grabs in the new historical theologies of the seventeenth century. Even more importantly, the distinctions of "true" and "false" religion were also up for debate; and central to these distinctions was the charge that pagan religions were false because they were based on poetic fables or perhaps even on Hebraic culture itself. For the state of this idea in the late seventeenth century, we can turn to John Milton's last poetic productions, *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes*.

A handful of scenes from these two poems, published together in 1671, demonstrates the importance of distinguishing pagan from Hebraic and Christian in the face of the new theologies and politics of the European world. In book 4 of *Paradise Regain'd* Satan begins his final push to tempt Jesus from his mission in the wilderness. One of the most enticing

temptations is pagan wisdom, the temptation for Jesus to immerse himself in Greek culture in order to convert the pagans. “Be famous then / By wisdom,” Satan says,

All knowledge is not couch’t in *Moses* Law,
The *Pentateuch* or what the Prophets wrote,
The *Gentiles* also know, and write, and teach
To admiration, led by Natures light;
And with the *Gentiles* much thou must converse[.]³⁹²

Satan runs through all the learning and arts of classical civilization, “the Olive Grove of *Academe*” (244); “*Lyceum* there, and painted *Stoa* next” (253); “*Aeolian* charms and *Dorian Lyric Odes*” (257); the “famous Orators . . . / whose resistless eloquence / Wiended at will that fierce Democratie” (267–69); and finally “*Socrates*” (274), the “*Peripatetics*” (279), and the “Sect / *Epicurean*, and the *Stoic* severe” (279–80). To reject the temptation of these classical arts and philosophies, Jesus’s response relies on distinctions of what is true and what is false.

And at times this response reveals the uneasiness that many, including Milton himself, must have felt about religious truth in the 1660s and 70s. In fact, Jesus’s response, for perhaps the first time, seems confused and unclear, even to the point of tangled and crude syntax:

Think not but that I know these things, or think
I know them not; not therefore am I short
Of knowing what I aught: he who receives
Light from above, from the fountain of light,
No other doctrine needs, though granted true;
But these are false, or little else but dreams,
Conjectures, fancies, built on nothing firm.
(286–92)

³⁹² *The Complete Works of John Milton, Volume II: The 1671 Poems, “Paradise Regain’d” and “Samson Agonistes,”* ed. Laura Lunger Knoppers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), lines 221–22 and 225–29. All subsequent quotations of this poem and *Samson Agonistes* will be from this edition, cited parenthetically in the text by line number.

Jesus needs no other doctrine except the one that is “granted true” from the light above. Does this mean that the “Light from above” grants things true merely by its whim, or is there some basis in nature and the created world for this distinction of truth? This is the trap Satan was trying to spring, but Jesus does seem to imply that only some people receive the light apart from nature, *and* that this light creates a truth unknowable by others. But Jesus also appears to imply that the light can give out doctrines that are not necessarily true. “Though” in line 290 could thus mean “as long as” or “if,” implying that there is a separate process of deciding what is true apart from the light granting doctrine to someone. This is a very important point, and Jesus leaves ambiguous the mechanism of God’s provision of “truth.”

It is a fairly weak distinction to rely on when Jesus then claims that Greek culture is “false.” But he continues the language of true and false throughout the rest of his rejection of pagan arts and ideas:

Who therefore seeks in these
True wisdom, finds her not, or by delusion
Far worse, her false resemblance only meets,
An empty cloud.
(318–21)

These philosophies and arts are “worth a sponge,” or “pibles on the shore” (329–30). But as a further basis for his rejection of pagan culture, he rehearses the argument that their arts are not original but rather derive from Hebraic culture:

Or if I would delight my private hours
With Music or with Poem, where so soon
As in our native Language can I find
That solace? All our Law and Story strew’d
With Hymns, our Psalms with artful terms inscrib’d,
Our Hebrew Songs and Harps in *Babylon*,
That pleas’d so well our Victors ear, declare
That rather *Greece* from us these Arts dervi’d;
Ill imitated, while they loudest sing
The vices of thir Deities, and thir own

In Fable, Hymn, or Song, so personating
Thir Gods ridiculous, and themselves past shame.
(331–43)

It is not clear why the derivation of the art forms should matter, though. There is nothing inherently wrong with the art forms of Greece; rather, they are simply bad imitations of Hebrew originals. Of course, not just the form but the content is also the problem. The pagan gods are obviously “ridiculous” and the singers and poets celebrating them “past shame.” But Jesus also seems to be arguing that art needs inspiration to be worthwhile. “*Sion’s* songs” (347) are “from God inspir’d” (350), but the pagan poems are not, “Unless where moral virtue is express’t / by light of Nature not in all quite lost” (351–52). But this last statement takes us back to Jesus’s original distinction of true doctrine granted by the “light” from above. We can only make sense of Jesus’s condemnation of pagan poetry by doing away with absolute distinctions of true and false; we have to believe along with Jesus that pagan arts are not outright fabrications but are merely copies. Finally, Jesus does return to an absolute standard of divine inspiration, but just as soon as he does, he also expands that standard to include “moral vertue” as a criterion of good art.

The most important point here is that the place of art and culture is implicated within distinctions of true and false. It matters which kinds of art are appropriate for expressing the divine. But it is entirely unclear from Jesus’s explanation where the standard of truth lies and whether or not it is one that applies to all. It certainly seems not to be a historical standard, and yet Jesus also uses a historical argument to suggest that pagan arts were mere copies of Hebrew arts. Why does the provenance matter at all if ultimately inspiration is to be the standard by which art is judged? It matters because of the very arguments that would occupy John Spencer and had occupied scholars of Hebraic culture in the seventeenth century. Did

God adapt pagan rituals and customs (including arts) for the Hebrews? Or the other way around? Was God rational? Can we provide an explanation of God's creation of various kinds of culture, or is the shifting, elusive standard of "truth" ultimately too personal to be used as a historical criterion?

When we turn the page to *Samson Agonistes*, these questions are muddled even further. They are the most important questions of the poem, though. Samson's place, and the place of Israel itself, amongst its enemies provides the occasion for Samson's anxious musings about his connection to God. He chose Timna, the "daughter of an infidel" (221), because he "knew / From intimate impulse" that he "motion'd was of God" (222–23). This impulse haunts Samson in his imprisonment, because he was of course supposed to be Israel's protector. His choice of wife thus matters a great deal. Did God wish Samson to marry not one but two pagan women, and if so, to what purpose was God commanding him to mix with the Canaanites, his "faithless enemy" (380)? Samson's "intimate impulse" represents the unknowable dictates of faith, the surety that comes from accepting divine commands that are only accessible to each individual believer. Samson curses himself for divulging his secret and causing his own woes and his enemies' exultation: "Sole Author I" (376), as he phrases it. The "infidels" around him materialize in the person of Dalila, who comes to justify her actions. Her religion, in contrast to Samson's, is mediated by priests and by the interests of society. As she describes her motivation to Samson, she is "Adjur'd by all the bonds of civil Duty / And of Religion" (853–54). Furthermore:

the Priest
Was not behind, but ever at my ear,
Preaching how meritorious with the gods
It would be to ensnare an irreligious
Dishonourer of *Dagon*: what had I
To oppose against such powerful arguments?

(857–62)

Finally, she is convinced by “that grounded maxim” (865), which states “that to the public good / Private respects much yield” (867–68). Dalila’s religion is evidently a civil religion, or at least one that attempts to manage private affections and public interest in the name of religion.

Samson, though, thinks that this kind of religion is not true religion at all. “I thought where all thy circling wiles would end; / In feign’d Religion, smooth hypocrisie” (871–72). Samson could mean that Dalila is feigning her adherence to her religion, but it seems more likely that Samson is calling her religion a “feign’d” religion. It appears from her account that the Philistine religion is a state religion, though with an emphasis on the “state” rather than the “religion.” Samson’s next speech effectively demolishes the pretenses of state religion, arguing that religion merely gives the state’s leaders the excuse it needs to expand its borders. He says that the Philistines had no authority over him, and

if aught against my life
Thy countrey sought of thee, it sought unjustly,
Against the law of nature, law of nations,
No more thy countrey, but an impious crew
Of men conspiring to uphold thir state[.]
(888–92)

That is bad enough, that the Philistines had no jurisdiction over Samson. Worse yet was the way that their false, idolatrous religion licenses Dalila’s sense of devotion:

But zeal mov’d thee;
To please thy gods thou didst it; gods unable
To acquit themselves and prosecute their foes
But by ungodly deeds, the contradiction
Of their own deity, Gods cannot be:
Less therefore to be pleas’d, obey’d, or fear’d,
These false pretexts and varnish’d colours failing,
Bare in thy guilt how foul must thou appear?
(895–902)

Samson is not necessarily arguing that Dalila was acting out of self-interest; rather, he acknowledges her “zeal,” a kind of indefinable sense of religious devotion that produces action. Religion is actually her motivation, but this particular religion is of course “ungodly” and full of “false pretexts.” So, what kind of “zeal” does this false religion produce? Is it a “false” zeal, or does it even make sense to describe zeal that way? Milton is circling once again around the problem that Jesus raised when he defended himself against Satan. The internal dictates of god are the final and highest standard of religious action, but how do we know if they are true or false? If all religions are capable of producing zeal, a feeling beyond reason, then who gets to decide which religion is correct?

Samson’s ultimate response to these questions argues that “conscience and internal peace” get to decide what religion is false and what true; furthermore, conscience gets to decide that if a religion is false then it may be destroyed. Samson is eloquent at the end of the poem when he faces the Philistine officer; he argues that his mind is free to obey or disobey the commands of his captors: “Can they think me so broken, so debas’d / With corporal servitude, that my mind ever / Will condescend to such absurd commands?” (1335–37). As the Chorus sums up Samson’s position, “Where the heart joins not, outward acts defile not” (1368). The problem, though, is fairly obvious. Where is God here? Does God himself direct Samson’s conscience, or is the process a bit more hazy? As Samson goes on to say, the darker side of religious conscience is zeal, and zeal may be created by purely human desires:

Lords are Lordliest in thir wine;
And the well-feasted Priest then soonest fir’d
With zeal, if aught Religion seem concern’d:
No less the people on thir Holy-days
Impetuous, insolent, unquenchable[.]
(1418–22)

Ultimately, of course, Samson's own belief leads to the ruin of the Philistines and himself. His final act brings about another mixture of heathen and faithful, which had been the cause of the problem in the first place. As the Messenger says, recounting Samson's destruction of the Philistine "Lords, Ladies, Captains, Councillors, [and] Priests" (1643), "*Samson* with these inmixt, inevitably / Pulld down the same destruction on himself; / The vulgar only scap'd who stood without" (1647–49). The final mixture joins Samson with his idolatrous enemies in a heap, and it is Milton's final image of religious mixture.

Samson thus ends by suggesting that any mixture between the faithful and the unfaithful will result in destruction. But Milton inserts one final distinction into the destruction when he leaves out the "vulgar . . . who stood without" (literally the "profane," those who were "in front of the temple"). Why include this detail? Samson and the Philistines were engaged in a kind of war of truth, with each side trying to reduce the religion of the other to personal or national interest. The God of Israel, after all, was still an ethnic God, ruling over a particular people even if he was the one true God. Dagon also stands in for a particular people who have particular rituals and customs. As John Rogers has shown, the entire poem turns on who has access to "secrets," to private information both human and divine.³⁹³ *Samson* ends with the competing esoteric religions destroying each other. Only those outside of the wars of religious belief escape destruction, while the upper echelons of Philistine society are punished for believing in the wrong god.

The critical response to Milton's later works, especially *Samson Agonistes*, has recently fixated intensely, and understandably so, on the problems I have been discussing. In his insistence on putting religious belief in dialogue with national identity, Milton does indeed invite characterizations such as Feisal G. Mohamed's, who terms Milton a "pre-

³⁹³ Rogers, "The Secret of *Samson Agonistes*," *Milton Studies* 33 (1997): 111–32.

secular” poet.³⁹⁴ In fact, Milton demands to be read within recent reevaluations of secularism and secularization in the late seventeenth century. As Mohamed claims, “Milton and his contemporaries took it for granted that the spiritual peace offered to the upright soul could express itself in justified slaughter if God so desired.” Milton’s extremism should force us, he argues, to “interrogate the coding of Christianity and Western culture as fundamentally non-violent, and turn a skeptical eye to any argument for the purity of a religious or cultural tradition.”³⁹⁵ But Mohamed seems to be saying that Milton’s Samson *is* claiming the purity of his cultural tradition, and that Milton would indeed adhere to a view of religious purity. We should be skeptical instead, he argues, of those who argue that religious and cultural purity can ever be non-violent. Mohamed is certainly too ready to describe Milton as a poet of rigidly held belief, as if his later poetry is utterly clear-sighted about its demarcations of true and false. (Nevertheless, his terms are valuable and we should not avoid this kind of discussion.) I have been suggesting that Milton’s poetry is not at all clear about demarcations of true and false, but Milton’s heroes certainly do deploy belief against what they perceive as false religions, and illegitimate governments. The formulation that Samson uses against Dalila remains troubling: your gods are false, he says, and thus your priests are liars, and thus the very foundations of your society are false. The consequences of this argument were unsettling for Milton, very obviously.

Pagan religion in this case acts as an index of Christian belief precisely because it depends on the kind of civil structure that Samson critiques. This is why, in the end we have to place the development of pagan religion in the Renaissance within a larger narrative of the

³⁹⁴ See Mohamed, *Milton and the Post-Secular Present: Ethics, Politics, Terrorism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 1–18, esp. 5 and 7.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 106.

“secularization” of religion in the seventeenth century.³⁹⁶ As the argument goes, religion and its rituals increasingly come under the control of the state in this period. Edward Muir terms this phenomenon “Government as a Ritual Process.”³⁹⁷ Furthermore, this process of government taking over the rituals of religion forms the pre-history of the separation of church and state; indeed, religious freedom itself starts out as something guaranteed by the state once it takes on the responsibility of policing religious distinctions.³⁹⁸ And this is one of the cornerstones of what it means for a society to be a “secular” society. Belief moves into an internal realm, which then licenses various forms of external expression that will in turn be unique to a particular belief system. As C. John Sommerville writes, in early modern England “Religious culture” changes to a “religious faith . . . in the sense of a separation of almost all aspects of life and thought from religious associations.”³⁹⁹ For Blair Worden, the rise of “civil religion” coincided with the rise of republican politics, but the idea of a civil religion itself was “only an extreme form of the transforming tendency evident within orthodox Christianity across the post-Restoration period: the shift of emphasis from faith to conduct.”⁴⁰⁰ Sommerville’s movement from culture to faith and Worden’s movement from faith to conduct are actually sympathetic processes. As faith moves inward the outward forms of religion become less subject to the demands of faith and more to the civil magistrate.

³⁹⁶ Indeed, there are no shortage of recent definitions, and my summary here will necessarily be brief. The texts that I will cite all contain useful bibliography, however.

³⁹⁷ Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 252–91.

³⁹⁸ See Elliott Visconsi, “The Invention of Criminal Blasphemy: Rex V. Taylor (1676),” *Representations* 103, no. 1 (2008): 30–52.

³⁹⁹ Sommerville, *The Secularization of Early Modern England: From Religious Culture to Religious Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3.

⁴⁰⁰ Worden, “The Question of Secularization,” in *A Nation Transformed: England After the Restoration*, ed. Alan Houston and Steve Pincus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 40.

So, according to these recent formulations, “secularization” signifies a process of gradual alignment of religious ritual and social custom. According to Charles Taylor, for example, the force of religious institutions declines in proportion to religious imperatives to regularize disciplinary norms for the laity. He attributes the decline of religious belief to the rise of what he calls a “disciplinary society,” in which the bonds of church and state become differentiated even as rituals become homogenized.⁴⁰¹ Taylor’s account culminates in his description of the “immanent frame” of modern life;⁴⁰² as Peter Gordon explains it, Taylor means that in the modern world “there has been a rupture between God and nature” and “it is at least *possible* to describe the cosmos . . . without reference to a non-human or transcendent source of meaning.”⁴⁰³ This kind of “immanence” proceeds not only from an increasing state control over rituals, but also from a gradually encroaching “disenchantment” in the world. This idea has been challenged and complicated by scholars such as Alexandra Walsham, who finds plenty of belief in the seventeenth century where it was once thought to have fled. Walsham also argues that we should consider the history of religious change in the Restoration and Enlightenment in decidedly more contingent terms than we usually do, as “successive loops in a perpetual spiral of desacralization and resacralization.”⁴⁰⁴ But even Walsham acknowledges that something was changing in the late seventeenth century: religion was becoming something other than the all-consuming force it once had been.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 90–145.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, 539–93.

⁴⁰³ Gordon, “The Place of the Sacred in the Absence of God: Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age*,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 69 (2008): 663.

⁴⁰⁴ Walsham, “The Reformation and ‘the Disenchantment of the World’ Reassessed,” *The Historical Journal* 51 (2008): 528.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 526.

And as the example of Milton's late poetry demonstrates, notions of false religion are crucial for these debates about secularization, disenchantment, and state control of religion. As so many argued, religions such as paganism could indeed be false if they relied on simulacra, idols, and representations that diverted devotion to the true God. *Samson Agonistes* itself recounts a movement from desacralization to resacralization, from the worship of idols to the affirmation of the power of the Israelite's one God. The Renaissance always had a powerful and troubling model of a purely civil religion in the pagan cultures it revered. It could look back on the secularized societies of ancient Greece and Rome, as negative models that gradually and almost imperceptibly regained their force in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But distinctions of true and false religion never lost their force, they simply moved off of center stage. The modern, comparative, cultural view of religions as neither true nor false was a product of the Renaissance expansion of the category of false religion to include the civil religions of the post-Restoration religious landscape. But as Milton's late heroes struggle against false religion, we can see the legacy of the ways that false religion had been defined, analyzed, and rejected. The Western world was moving toward a new definition of religion that would blunt the force of distinctions of true and false, but these distinctions never lost their force or their potential to generate violence. Vico, on the other hand, validated the relevance of the pagan view of religion as "poetic," thereby crystallizing a viewpoint that resembles that of Émile Durkheim, Mircea Eliade, and other scholars of religion in the twentieth century. While those scholars would not argue that any religion is false, it is incumbent upon us as scholars of the early modern world to struggle with what it means to call a religion false, and to believe that it is.

The history of pagan religion as poetry, as a human creation against which true belief could be exercised, or toward which human society could tend, is an important one. And as I have suggested throughout this dissertation, literature and especially poetry has been central to the construction of pagan religions as false. But the history of the interpenetrations of poetry and false religion reveal why we are able now to think about literature as a religious phenomenon and about religion as a poetic creation. There exists religious poetry just as there exists poetic religion, though early moderns assigned different values to each. The consequences of this kind of discourse of religious and poetic distinction are becoming more and more evident in our post-secular world, and certainly their importance was unavoidable in the early modern world.

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