The Rhetoric of Propriety in Puritan Sermon Writing and Poetics

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by

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The Rhetoric of Propriety: Towards a Dialectical Method of Reading
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Introduction

The Rhetoric of Propriety and the Propriety of Rhetoric

“Propriety,” argues Richard Lanham in *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, is “a pious fraud, the ‘social trick’ par excellence” (46). Lanham’s condensed and quick dismissal of propriety as a rhetorical norm characterizes well several attempts by contemporary rhetoricians to theorize propriety’s role in rhetorical situation. Debates over the usefulness of propriety have tended to reawaken the classical debates over rhetoric’s status as an art or blunt the theoretical edge propriety offers as a concept for rhetorical analysis. Rhetoricians in the latter group have argued that the reasoning capacity itself behaves rhetorically when one renders judgments about the world; however, this kind of “epistemic” rhetoric blurs the contours of the concept, as Stephen J. McKenna concludes in *The Rhetoric of Propriety* when he writes that “the universal or omnivorous quality of such a rhetoric would hold obvious problems for a theory that would support a usable methodology” (4). Broadening the theoretical scope of rhetorical propriety to include any kind of rhetorical judgment whatever stretches the applicability of the concept to its vanishing point, which calls into question rhetoric’s “teachability” and its status as an art. A rhetoric in which rhetorical propriety has clearly delimited conceptual meaning(s) would have to be *both* contextually situated (i.e. as a concept that says something meaningful about rhetorical situations) *and* historically situated (i.e. as a concept that changes from historical moment to historical moment). It is precisely this (contextually, historically) situated quality of rhetorical propriety that has made it so theoretically elusive to philosophers and rhetoricians, so elusive in fact that some have argued that it is beyond theorizing. However, rhetorical theorists and historians of rhetoric have largely overlooked dialectical method as a valid approach to theorizing
and historicizing the concept of propriety.\(^1\) Dialectical method offers an analytical movement that captures the theoretical and practical character of rhetorical propriety, for it not only clarifies the relational logic between the concept of rhetorical propriety and its applicability to specific rhetorical situations, but also accounts for subtle tensions between the different senses of propriety as they meet in specific rhetorical situations and change from historical moment to historical moment.

Rhetorical propriety has continued to elude rhetorical theorists and historians of rhetoric largely because few have examined the concept dialectically and have therefore reached one of two conclusions. The first is that “the concept may seem so obvious and intuitive, so rooted in the very nature of human experience as to be pre-theoretical” (3). McKenna cites, for example, Craig La Driere’s discussion of the concept as illustrative of this first view. Though La Driere focuses specifically on aesthetic judgment, he suggests that rhetorical propriety can be applied to any judgment whatever, which would elevate the concept to an episteme. La Driere contends that

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\(^1\) I reference several different kinds of dialectic in the chapters that follow: pre-Socratic dialectic, Socratic dialectic, Ramist dialectic, Hegelian dialectic, and Marxist dialectic. I define these very different dialectical methods in the chapters in which I reference them. In its most general sense, dialectical method means examining objects of analysis as parts or aspects of larger wholes as well as the parts or aspects that constitute the wholes as wholes at another moment or level of analysis. Methodologically, it requires the analyst to hover between particulars and universals. I explain the dialectical method I use in the dissertation in the Conclusion, titled “The Rhetoric of Propriety: Towards a Dialectical Method of Reading.” More specifically, I explain how rhetorical propriety can be understood not only as a rhetorical concept, but also as a dialectical method of analysis. I also address in the conclusion the theoretical warrants for this analysis. This dissertation’s method of analysis is both structural and historical. Informing the structural analysis is Bertell Ollman’s explication of dialectical materialism in *Dance of the Dialectic* and *Dialectical Investigations*. Informing the historical analysis is Raymond Williams’s conceptualization of dominant, emergent, and residual ideologies in *Marxism and Literature*. This dissertation largely focuses on structural analysis not only because I resist the Marxist tendency to dismiss religious discourse as “ideological,” but also because—by itself—structural analysis offers a rich reading of the literature. Certainly, more work needs to be done to further enrich our understanding of rhetorical propriety in the historical moments under investigation in this dissertation.
Perhaps [rhetorical propriety’s] repugnance to specification is evidence that the idea of fitness is specific enough without reduction to any more concrete formula, and directly applicable to experience without being made less abstract. Perhaps its very obdurate abstractness, its resistance to assimilation by any particular context and its consequent elasticity in application to all contexts, explain its hardy persistence, and its permanent value, as a principle of aesthetic judgment. (3)

La Driere accounts for stylistic propriety as a measure of “good taste,” but only to show that it so saturates lived experience that it is hardly a concept characteristic of any particular art. However, it is precisely this “all-encompassing” quality of rhetorical propriety that renders it methodologically useless as a concept for rhetorical analysis.

The second cause of theorists’ neglect of the concept of rhetorical propriety is related to the first. If the first view is that propriety so saturates lived experience that it becomes theoretically elusive, the second view is that because it saturates lived experience, propriety must then be questioned as illusory. McKenna traces propriety-thinking in this second view to ideology-thinking: “On the other hand and usually in opposition to ‘intuitive’ view of propriety is the view that responds to the problem of propriety by seeing it as groundable only on ideological or foundational premises. In this essentially Marxist view,” writes McKenna, “the task of the rhetorician in regard to propriety is not to theorize it but to puncture it, exposing the ideology of which it is a symptom” (3). As a measure of decorous behavior or correct diction, for example, propriety belies the real material relations that invest imagined social relations with their power. In this view, rhetorical propriety serves the interests of the ruling class, which aims to “naturalize” propriety so as to place it beyond theorizing, after which speech and action become
subject to the dictates of “good taste.” Marxists listen carefully to appeals to “good taste,” for in this rather hollow aesthetic and ethical standard they hear the sounds of social struggle. As illustrative of this second view, McKenna cites Roland Barthes’s critique of pre-structuralist criticism. Barthes levels his critique at classical criticism’s “pretense to objectivity” and the classical “insistence on clarity of language.” Barthes asks,

What shall we call this group of interdictions which belong to both ethics and aesthetics and in which classical criticism invests all those values which it cannot claim to be knowledge? Let us call this system of prohibitions good taste. . . .

As a servant shared by ethics and aesthetics, it allows us to have a convenient turnstile connecting the Beautiful and the Good, discreetly merged in the form of a simple measure. However, this measure has all the disappearing power of a mirage. (3)

For the poststructuralist theorist, propriety is illusory, a symptom of ideology. Its emptiness as an ethical or aesthetic principle becomes all the more apparent when one considers it as a measure of “principled” action and speech—as in polite conduct or polished language, for instance.

The poststructuralist theorist’s resistance to discursive norms makes any appeal to propriety, as Richard Lanham argues, “a pious fraud, the ‘social trick’ par excellence” (46). In Lanham’s view, propriety is without particular, “specifiable” content simply because an observer merely notes the appearance of propriety by the appearance of an impropriety. Lanham writes that

as a stylistic criterion decorum [or propriety] finally locates itself entirely in the beholder and not in the speech or text. No textual pattern is decorous or not. The final criterion for excess, indecorum, is the stylistic self-consciousness induced
by the text or the social situation. We know decorum is present when we don’t notice it and vice-versa. Decorum is a gestalt established in the perceiving intelligence. Thus the need for it, and the criteria for it can attain universal agreement and allegiance, and yet the concept itself remains without specifiable content. (46)

One is socialized into recognizing propriety and impropriety in much the same way as one is socialized into recognizing or misrecognizing certain social conventions and discursive norms, and it is the work of the rhetorical theorist to interrogate these conventions and explode these norms at the first sight of social injustice. Because, as Lanham argues, classical rhetorical theory has largely discussed “how to adjust utterance[s] to this preexistent social reality without reflecting how that reality has been constituted by the idea of decorum” (46), rhetorical theory has missed crucial opportunities to examine propriety as an active element in the construction of social reality.

Considered as nothing more than discursive norms, propriety would indeed disappear into a background of social convention. This process of socialization would position the language user to calibrate his utterance to the “preexistent social reality” Lanham claims has commonly served as classical rhetorical theorists’ measure of the appropriate. In this view, the dominant cultural formation at any given historical moment supports and advances the preexistent social reality, and propriety abets the dominant cultural ideology by offering discursive standards against which language users’ utterances can be judged correct or incorrect, appropriate or inappropriate. However, propriety is more than just the recognition of existing social conventions and discursive
norms. It serves as an index of real, material social relations. To theorize propriety is to theorize language as a site of social struggle, in which dominant, residual, and emergent cultural formations all contend with one another for ascendancy. Raymond Williams offers the analytical categories of the dominant, residual, and emergent cultural formation in *Marxism and Literature* to revise the traditional Marxist view of history—namely, the Hegelian view offered by Georg Lukács—as a series of stages or epochs characterized by a dominant ideology or “spirit of the times.” Williams’ analytical categories assume that any one historical stage is far more dynamic and contentious than Lukács understood it, that the dominant cultural formation of each epoch must be analyzed as being composed of often contradictory dominant, residual, and emergent cultural formations. These “moments,” as Williams termed them, allow the social analyst room to analyze the role subversive and oppositional identities play in the formation of culture.

To properly theorize rhetorical propriety, then, rhetorical theorists and historians of rhetoric ought to embrace dialectical method to work out the many theoretical and historical tensions rhetorical propriety presents. Marxist dialectic has traditionally been understood and applied as a method for overcoming “ideology-thinking,” which is a limited view of both dialectical method and “ideology-thinking.” Dialectical method offers a way of examining propriety as a literary, rhetorical, and socio-economic concept, and each of these analytical moments not only shows that propriety crosses disciplinary boundaries and knowledge domains, but also places rhetorical propriety at the center of social relations whose material relations get mediated in and through language. “Ideology” has perhaps become too loaded a concept to adequately analyze and characterize the “rhetorical” tensions between mind and matter in the

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2 Lanham’s view that “[d]ecorum is a gestalt established in the perceiving intelligence” (46) hypostatizes the meaning of rhetorical propriety by locating and isolating it with the audience alone, when in fact it takes shape, much like Aristotle’s understanding of *ethos*, in the dynamic between speaker and audience. In other words, it is *mediated* in the speech itself.
process of socialization. Although rhetorical approaches to literature are nothing new, few literary critics and literary historians have examined rhetorical propriety outside of literary decorum—how literary genre shapes and is shaped by a sense of literary propriety. Even fewer rhetoricians have examined religious rhetoric and poetics as precisely the site where tensions inherent in the concept of rhetorical propriety are taken up as an extension of the argument over the propriety of religious rhetoric. To dismiss rhetorical propriety as either “beyond theorizing” or “ideological” is to overlook the importance propriety holds as a theoretical concept as well as the importance rhetoric holds as a methodological approach to language practice, whatever the representational system—spoken, dramatic, or graphic.

Rhetorical propriety remains an elusive concept in rhetorical theory largely because theorists have based their thinking about rhetorical propriety in classical rhetorical tradition, and more specifically, in sophistic rhetoric. Sophistic rhetoricians posit that rhetorical propriety cannot be separated from the social and cultural milieu that gives rise to it. Rhetorical propriety, these theorists contend, resists definition in standards or norms because to separate the concept from its socio-cultural “situation” and render it applicable to all situations is to reduce the concept to an ideology. Stanley Fish argues in *Doing What Comes Naturally*, for instance, that theorizing rhetorical propriety positions the theorist between a “foundational” and “anti-foundational” rhetoric. Fewer and fewer rhetoricians embrace the “foundational” view, for to achieve this view, rhetoricians would have to approach as “unproblematic” determinants the orator or writer discovers in his rhetorical situation. These determinants are always problematical, says Fish, for they are indistinguishable from the rhetorical situation. Fish at once questions the methodological

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3 As Edward Schiappa convincingly demonstrates in *Protagoras and Logos: A Study in Greek Philosophy and Rhetoric*, it is anachronistic to refer to a “sophistic rhetoric.” The Sophists used the term *logos* to refer to the language practices Plato later came to call ῥητορικός (*rhētorikós*). However anachronistic it is to make the reference, I do so for sake of simplicity, observing points of commonality among Sophists, such as Protagoras and Gorgias, rather than emphasizing their differences.
value of the “foundational” view and the pedagogical efficacy of the “anti-foundational” view in the teaching of rhetoric.

The truth [writes Fish] is that a situation is not an entity, but a bundle of tacit or unspoken assumptions that is simultaneously organizing the world and changing in response to its own organizing work. A situation is always on the wing, and any attempt to capture it will only succeed in fixing it in a shape it no longer has. Moreover, any attempt to capture it must itself be mounted from within a situation, and therefore the knowledge afforded by such an exercise is not only out-of-date but disputable. In short, if the teaching of the theory of situations is inefficacious, the teaching of situations themselves is impossible and a contradiction in terms. (352)

Fish elevates rhetoric to an epistemology, which renders rhetorical propriety methodologically suspect or at the very least questionable. This epistemological view of rhetoric forces Fish to confront a logical impasse: To present rhetorical propriety independent from rhetorical situation renders it transferable to other situations, to be sure, but ideologically contentious; and yet, to present rhetorical propriety as “situated” reduces the concept to its vanishing point, for the concept becomes nontransferable and therefore useless.  

Fish’s conclusion that the teaching of situations is impossible and a contradiction in terms leaves little discursive space to theorize rhetorical propriety, much less render it a usable

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4 Fish refers to the “transferability” of the concept as its “cashabililty” (352). The term “cashability” suggests economic exchange in discursive exchange, which becomes important for Christian writers like Augustine and Edward Taylor, whose metaphors appeal to a “spiritual economy” predicated upon the Word of God in the Scriptures. The materials of the preacher-poets’ vocations are words, and the Word of God “backs” or “underwrites” their discourses with spiritual value. The concept of propriety thus accounts for economic and discursive exchange, or in the case of the Christian preacher-poet, the spiritual value that underwrites discursive exchange.
methodology. McKenna briefly examines the history of rhetorical propriety in *The Rhetoric of Propriety*, culling references to the concept from classical treatises on rhetoric in order to offer a more complete theory of rhetorical propriety, if not a usable method. McKenna briefly examines Fish’s position on rhetorical propriety and traces its theoretical warrant to J. L. Austin’s blurring of the linguistic distinction between “constative” and “performative” utterances in *How to Do Things with Words*. McKenna finds that Fish accepts Austin’s contention that constative utterances, or speech acts “susceptible to judgments of truth, falsity, or verisimilitude,” ought to be considered a subset of performative utterances, or speech acts that “‘do things’ in the world and are thus only susceptible to judgments of ‘felicity’ or ‘appropriateness’” (3). Fish’s difficulty theorizing rhetorical propriety stems directly from his acceptance of Austin’s conflation of constative and performative utterances, says McKenna, for “Fish ironically embraces propriety, but only after it has served as the insight that leads to the radical contextualization of meaning” (3). Fish concludes in his essay “Rhetoric,” for example, that “the formal core of language disappears entirely, and is replaced by a world of utterances vulnerable to the sea change of every circumstance—the world, in short, of rhetorical (situated) man” (213). It is precisely this radical contextualization of meaning that leads Fish to question in *Doing What Comes Naturally* the

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5 The “constative” utterance answers to the criterion of truth or verisimilitude. It is an utterance that objectively reports an occurrence or makes an observation that has some grounding in fact, as in “Tom is writing a letter” or “The French won the Battle of Hastings.” These utterances make observations or report facts about the here and now or the then and there, and so the words match the world. One can test the truth or falsity of a constative utterance. The “performative” utterance, on the other hand, does something in the world. The words shape or change the world in some way, as in “Please leave the room” or “Why don’t you move in with me?” These utterances have a “situated” quality, for their interpretation hinges upon their propriety—the socio-cultural relation between interlocutors. One might respond to the first request, “Please leave the room,” by simply leaving the room; another respond by saying, “I’d like to stay, thank you.” One might accept the offer “Why don’t you move in with me?” gratefully; another reject the offer, saying, “I appreciate your concern, but I cannot afford it.” Austin argues that the “constative” utterance also has a “situated” character, for it too depends on the context in which it is uttered and received. “The French won the Battle of Hastings,” for instance, depends on how one identifies the “French”—perhaps qualifying instead them as “Norman-French”—or how one defines winning and losing a battle, or where the battle was actually fought (for it was fought on Senlac Hill, a little over six miles northwest of Hastings). Austin thus argues for the radical contextualization of meaning in his conflation of constative and performative utterances.
functionality and applicability of the formal rules of grammar and propriety—of any knowledge whatever—that is removed from its rhetorical situation.

Fish’s epistemological rhetoric presents a logical impasse between the formal rules or “grammar” of rhetorical propriety, which can be extrapolated from rhetorical situations in which these rules are applied, and the situations themselves. The tensions Fish notes are dialectical in their form and movement, tensions which have been implied in art of rhetoric from the classical tradition to the present. One of the commonplaces of the classical rhetorical tradition was that the orator must have a natural facility with language, which then gets cultivated in the study of rhetoric, for the orator cannot consciously consider rhetoric’s “rules” in the midst of a speech simply because the time of their application will have already passed him by. Fish’s impasse is thus the impasse of classical rhetoric, which gets its clearest articulation in the Sophistic-Socratic debates over the essence and ends of rhetoric, as well as in the debates over the value of extrapolating rhetoric’s rules that they might be applied to various rhetorical situations. At the heart of these debates is the “teachability” of rhetoric and whether a usable methodology or general rules can ever be drawn, much less even known, from specific rhetorical situations. As a historian of rhetoric, McKenna examines classical rhetorical tradition to identify the etymological substance of rhetorical propriety in order to show that by the nineteenth century, in the writings of Adam Smith, rhetorical propriety becomes coterminous with “audience sentiment” or the orator’s sympathy or fellow-feeling with his hearers concerning the subject of his speech. McKenna’s focus on the pathos of rhetorical propriety is his answer to Fish’s logical impasse, which, by degrees, relegates ethos and logos to the periphery of McKenna’s treatment of the concept. That Fish’s impasse is based in an epistemological view of rhetoric not only requires the kind of aesthetic or stylistic analysis that McKenna offers in The Rhetoric of Propriety, but also requires a fuller analysis of ethics and logic than is implied in McKenna’s treatment of rhetorical
propriety. To round out McKenna’s analysis of rhetorical propriety as “audience sympathy,” then, Fish’s “epistemological rhetoric” must be embraced rather than ignored. In fact, a fuller treatment of rhetorical propriety is one that examines the tensions between Fish’s “epistemological” view and McKenna’s “aesthetical-ethical” view dialectically, and discovers that underwriting rhetorical propriety is an “aesthetical-epistemology” that mediates the orator’s and his hearers’ understanding of their rhetorical situation.

In The Rhetoric of Propriety, McKenna traces the concept of rhetorical propriety from its “pretechnical” form through its Sophistic, Socratic, Aristotelian, and Ciceronian forms, showing that the Greeks used several terms to signify appropriateness, but primarily used the term to prepon in situations where stylistic propriety was intended. The term to prepon has its roots in the verb prepein, which means “to appear before the eyes” or “to be seen conspicuously.” McKenna observes that this form of seeing “emanates from the eyes as much as it is the observation of external objects; sight is then both passive and active, both inwardly receptive and outwardly projective, both self-motivated and other-directed, balancing the attributes of microcosm and macrocosm, human and divine” (27).^6 McKenna here notes the “subjective” and “objective”

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^6 In his book Downcast Eyes, Martin Jay corroborates the visual bias McKenna traces to Greek speculative philosophy, which had far-reaching influence upon Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition and Judeo-Christian religious tradition. Jay argues that

The Greek privileging of vision meant more than relegating the other senses to subordinate positions; it could also lead to the denigration of language in several respects. Outside the often maligned tradition of Sophism, language was deemed inferior to sight as the royal road to the truth. It was the realm…of mere doxa (opinion) instead. Rhetoric was thus banished from genuine philosophy. Even when the Greeks discussed verbal phenomena like metaphors, they tended to reduce them to transparent figures, likenesses that were mimetic resemblances, not the interplay of sameness and difference. “To produce a good metaphor,” Aristotle claimed in his Poetics, “is to see a likeness.” (33)

Jay finds the substance of the Sophistic-Socratic debate in Greek speculative philosophers’ inclination toward pure specularity, a privileging of visual ideational material that conflicted with Greek rhetoricians’ emphasis on oral-aural representations of opinion or belief. Jay also offers Greek oculcentrism as the perceptual basis for the Greeks’ revision of the Hebrew Scriptures in the New Testament. “One of the major differences between Judaism and Christianity,” writes Jay, was the latter’s faith in the corporeal incarnation of the divine in human form, which meant that the Mosaic taboo against graven images could easily be called into question. In its place, there
dialectic implied in the verb *prepein* and analyzes its characteristics, each of which suggests elements of rhetorical situation: that rhetorical propriety’s “origins are in the cosmic or natural order;” that “it is associated with clear perception through the senses, especially vision;” that “it occasions a pleasurable aesthetic response in hearers;” and that “it results in conspicuous social appearance for the speaker” (28). These characteristics McKenna parses in order to posit a more complete theory of rhetorical propriety, but only the final three characteristics make their way into classical rhetorical tradition through Aristotle’s categorization of appeals: *logos*, or a sense of propriety “associated with clear perception through the senses, especially vision;” *pathos*, or a sense of propriety that “occasions a pleasurable aesthetic response in hearers;” and *ethos*, or a sense of propriety that “results in conspicuous social appearance for the speaker.”

McKenna’s treatment of rhetorical propriety becomes increasingly focused on the characteristic of stylistic propriety that occasions a pleasurable aesthetic response in hearers, for he ties rhetorical propriety to *pathos* or the hearers’ sympathetic feelings with a speaker about the subject of the speech. In order to reach this focus, McKenna divides rhetorical propriety into idealist and realist senses, both of which he bases in audience analysis. The idealist sense McKenna traces to the Platonic contention that a legitimate art of rhetoric would clearly delineate arose a very non-Jewish belief in the visible sacraments and the visible church. This tendency culminated in the late medieval practice of elevating the consecrated host for all worshippers to see. Although the earliest Church fathers like Origen, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria distrusted the pagan residues in images and feared an overly anthropomorphic notion of the holy, their successors soon recognized the power of sighting the Christian story available to the hoards of new believers from non-Jewish backgrounds. As early as the Hellenization of Christian doctrine begun by the converted Jew Philo of Alexandria in the first century, biblical references to hearing were systematically transformed into ones referring to “sight.” The Gospel of John had said that “God is Light,” and medieval thinkers like the Pseudo Dionysus took the expression literally. (36) Jay summarizes the differences between Hebraic and Hellenic theological impulses thus: “If the Jews could begin their most heartfelt prayer, ‘Hear, O Israel,’ the Greek philosophers were in effect urging, ‘See, O Hellas’” (33). Although Jay largely focuses on the “uneasy balance” between the Hebraic proclivity toward orality and the Hellenic proclivity toward visibility in the medieval Christian church, these tensions are especially poignant in post-Reformation Christianity, specifically in Puritans’ desire to return to the doctrines and liturgy of the early Christian church.
its materials—the different types of hearers’ souls—and shape these materials to the ends of the art: persuading hearers to see and embrace the good. Plato argues in the *Phaedrus*, for instance, that a legitimate art of rhetoric would analyze its materials to discover that hearers’ souls are of a determine number and that the orator ought to address each type of soul in suitable style: “a variegated soul in a variegated style,” a “simple soul in a simple style” (277c). Because Plato’s theory of rhetorical propriety was still relatively underdeveloped, Aristotle answered Plato’s call for a dialectical treatment of rhetoric’s materials. McKenna thus traces the realist sense of rhetorical propriety to Aristotle.

In his *Rhetoric*, especially Books II and III, Aristotle analyzes the different types of hearers and the styles that are best suited to persuade them. Aristotle also adds a sophistic element to his analysis of the art, which, McKenna argues, can be traced to Gorgias’ *kairotic* understanding of rhetorical propriety as that which is fitting in time, place, and circumstance. McKenna claims that it was the itinerant nature of the Sophists’ profession that shaped their understanding of rhetorical propriety. The Sophists believed that they developed an eminently teachable form of rhetoric that could account for socio-cultural relativity and address the contingencies of time, place, and circumstance. Aristotle’s starting point in his *Rhetoric*—that dialectic and rhetoric are “counterpart arts”—has greater significance when examined through the lens of rhetorical propriety. Aristotle not only achieves a dialectical pairing of the language arts of rhetoric and dialectic using the art of dialectic itself, but also directly addresses the substance of the Sophistic-Socratic debate by defining rhetoric’s materials, extrapolating rhetoric’s rules, and rendering the art teachable. The methodological “sticking point” that Fish identifies and

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7 Just as Aristotle answers Plato’s “idealist” conception of rhetorical propriety and offers a “realist” approach to the concept in his *Rhetoric*, Quintilian answers Cicero’s “perfect” or “complete” orator and offers a systematic approach to the orator’s education in his *Institutes of Oratory*. I discuss the connection between rhetorical propriety and the perfect, complete, or ideal orator below.
McKenna largely overlooks is the “situated” or kairotic view of rhetorical propriety that Aristotle examines at some length in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. Between his *Rhetoric* and *Ethics*, Aristotle comes closest to a dialectical examination of rhetorical propriety, from which a methodologically useful (i.e. applicable and teachable) understanding of rhetorical propriety can be extrapolated.

Of the three artistic proofs Aristotle categorizes as primary and secondary depending upon the genre, he concluded that *ethos*, or ethical proofs, are “the most effective means of proof” (1356a). Rhetoricians before (and still some after) Aristotle had aligned ethical proof with the orator’s character, so that *êthos* precedes the orator into his speaking situation and begins securing his audience’s belief. Aristotle claimed, however, that *êthos* actually arises from the speech itself. He argued that coupled with the moral virtue (*arête*) of the orator, rhetoricians must also consider the common ground or good will (*eunoia*) the orator establishes between himself and his audience, as well as the orator’s and his hearers’ practical reasoning (*phronēsis*) in weighing the subject matter of the speech. Because the audience’s sense of the orator’s moral virtue results from their knowledge of his character, *êthos as arête* does indeed precede the orator into his speaking situation. The other two *êthos*-related proofs, on the other hand, arise from emotional and logical inflections on the ethical proof. An orator establishes *eunoia* or a sense of good will with his hearers when the style of his speech evokes the proper emotion; and both orator and audience exercise *phronēsis* when the style the orator uses appears appropriate to the species of rhetoric and the speech’s subject matter. This sense of appropriateness linking speaker and audience in both *eunoia* and *phronēsis* positions propriety at the center of Aristotle’s understanding of an effective rhetoric.

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8 By ethical “proof” I posit in the manner of Eugene Garver in *Aristotle’s Rhetoric: An Art of Character* that human character can be rationally expressed and thus rendered intelligible to a discerning audience.
Aristotle thus shifts the traditional focus on \textit{èthos}, and its emotional and logical inflections, from the speaker to the speech because he is much more interested than his predecessors in a material and practical rhetoric. The materials of the speech, of course, are the many styles in which the orator discloses his subject matter. Propriety is central to Aristotle’s understanding of good style, but the logical proof he treats in Book I and the emotional proof he treats in Book II seem to fall \textit{dialectically} under the ethical proof he treats in Book III, where he writes that “Propriety of style \textit{[to prepon]} will be obtained by the expression of emotion and character, and by proportion \textit{[analogen]} to the subject matter” (1408a12). All three artistic proofs must work in concert, but in the right proportion, to achieve a stylistically effective speech. In Book III, Aristotle develops this theory of stylistic propriety:

Style is proportionate \textit{[analogen]} to the subject matter when neither weighty matters are treated offhand, nor trifling matters with dignity, and no embellishment is attached to an ordinary word; otherwise there is an appearance of comedy. . . . Style expresses emotion, when a man speaks with anger of wanton outrage; with indignation and reserve, even in mentioning them, of things foul or impious; with admiration of things praiseworthy; with lowliness of things pitiable; and so in all other cases. Appropriate style also makes the fact appear credible; for the mind of the hearer is imposed upon \textit{[paralogizetai—will draw a wrong conclusion or logical error]} under the impression that the speaker is speaking the truth, because in such circumstances, his feelings are the same, so that he thinks (even if it is not the case as the speaker puts it) that things are as he represents them; and the hearer always sympathizes with one who speaks emotionally, even though he really says nothing. This is why speakers often confound their hearers by mere noise. (1408a10-25)
Aristotle’s appeal to the “proportionate” use of each artistic proof suggests several forms of stylistic propriety. A speech’s style should be commensurate with the subject matter and the speaker’s emotional response to it, for not only is the audience disposed to feel a certain way about the subject matter, but the speaker also aims to shape his hearers’ feelings to a certain extent. Aristotle emphasizes how the subject matter appears to both orator and audience, or rather how the orator makes the subject appear to his audience, arguing that disproportionate emotion or embellishment can result in the appearance of comedy even though the orator was not looking to entertain his audience; likewise, appropriate style can make facts appear credible, even if the orator leads his audience to a faulty conclusion.

The rational nature of propriety that Aristotle treats in this passage looks back to the sight-related understanding of propriety implied in the verb prepein, which means “to appear conspicuously” and suggests the appearance of fittingness between the style and the subject matter. Because the speech’s style also discloses the appropriate emotional response to the subject matter, Aristotle also treats an irrational element in his theory of propriety. Aristotle couples the rational element (phronēsis) and the irrational element (eunoia) as logical and emotional inflections of ethical proof simply because persuasion is effected in part by the speaker’s clear and accurate representation of the subject matter to his audience and in part by the audience’s sympathy with the speaker’s emotional response to the subject matter. Aristotle names clarity (saphêneia) and propriety (prepon) his two chief stylistic virtues because clear speech means not just correct diction (the sine qua non of thought’s verbal transmission), but the audience’s belief that things are precisely the way the speaker represents them in his speech; and proper speech

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9 Mimesis is central to the Aristotle’s “materialist” or “realist” view of rhetoric. However, Aristotle takes Plato’s “idealist” view of rhetoric as his starting point.
means not just adapting correct diction to the right type of discourse, but also eliciting the right emotional response from the audience.

Aristotle takes his theory of stylistic propriety, which he develops from the ethical proof, to its logical conclusion in his *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*. Aristotle’s view that the orator’s moral character is largely “due to the speech itself” (*Rhetoric* 1356a9) places stylistic propriety at the core of his understanding of human nature. Whereas culture and convention had served to shape the sophistic notion of proper speech and action, Aristotle instead posits a rhetorically purposive view of stylistic propriety, in which the emotive character of a speech tells us something about the character of the speaker. “In effect,” writes McKenna, “fitting style serves as a latent minor premise of an enthymeme whose universal premise is something such as, ‘All speakers whose speech exhibits X style are of X character’” (39). Aristotle further develops his theory of stylistic propriety in his *Ethics* in his concept of *phronësis*, which he defines, at once, as a person’s capacity to make moral choices and as the basis for all the other moral virtues. As a rhetorical concept, *phronësis* means surveying the rhetorical situation to discover the most appropriate means of persuasion. The concept already has ethical implications when the orator considers his hearers’ known mental and emotional habits in order to “clothe” his speech in those same habits. “Habits,” for Aristotle, “are not mere behavioral adaptations to or accidents of culturally stipulated moral convention, but the outcome of having exercised the activity (*energeia*) of virtue (1103a33)—deliberate, moral choice (*proairesis*)” (41). Aristotle treats stylistic propriety alongside *êthos* because stylistic propriety is *deliberative*; it is an ethical consideration.

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10 The ethical proof is the privileged proof of deliberative rhetoric, and deliberative rhetoric the genre into which political discourse primarily falls.
After Aristotle developed his nuanced theory of rhetorical and ethical propriety, few philosophers considered propriety an ethical problem, much less a rhetorical problem, until Cicero treated it in his *Orator*. Cicero esteemed Aristotle’s writings highly, calling them “*flumen orationis aureum*” (L. “a golden river of eloquence”). Cicero also placed propriety at the center of his understanding of rhetoric, but he never reached the kind of theoretical nuance Aristotle did in his *Rhetoric*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and *Politics*, respectively. Rather, in his *Orator*, Cicero suggests that propriety resists theoretical prescription, writing that although “[i]t is difficult to describe the ‘form’ or ‘pattern’ of the ‘best’ (for which the Greek word is *charaktêr*), because different people have different notions of what is best” (36), the ideal orator will know how best to suit his speech to the demands of his speaking situation to win his audience’s “opinion and approval” (24). By citing the Greek word *charaktêr* to treat the best possible means of persuasion, Cicero nods to Aristotle’s pairing of stylistic propriety and ethical proof, but he refuses to treat its implications. His ideal orator simply knows which style best suits audience, subject, and occasion. First, the ideal orator knows his rhetorical offices and the styles best suited to them: the plain style must be used to demonstrate (L. *probare*), the “mixed” or middle style to delight (L. *delectare*), and the grand style to move the emotions (L. *flectere*). Second, the ideal orator knows which styles best suit certain subjects, for he must “select the loci that fit [L. *aptis*] the subject” (47). Finally, the ideal orator must know when (and when not) to teach, please, and persuade, so that his rhetorical duties (L. *officii*) carry a kairotic element which he must be able to perceive in his speaking situation. For all his treatment of what is “best,” however, rhetorical propriety remains theoretically slippery for Cicero, and he admits as much in his *Orator* when he writes that

> In an oration, as in life, nothing is harder to determine than what is appropriate. The Greeks call it *prepon*; let us call it *decorum*. . . . For the same style and the
same thoughts must not be used in portraying every condition in life, or every
rank, position or age, and in fact a similar distinction must be made in response
to place, time, and audience. The universal rule, in oratory as in life, is to
consider propriety. (70-71)

Cicero elevates rhetorical propriety to a “universal rule” seemingly beyond scope of his rhetorical
considerations. That his orator is “ideal” releases him from the task of theorizing what is most
important to the orator—a keen sense of stylistic propriety.

Cicero was less the philosopher than the statesman, lawyer, and prose stylist. Whereas
Aristotle, like the Greeks before him, paired rhetorical propriety with verbal and conceptual
clarity (i.e. the language user’s visual-mental-verbal acuity), and so treated propriety as a rational
or epistemological concern, Cicero, on the other hand, focuses on the aesthetic and ethical
implications of rhetorical propriety. This is not to say that Cicero does not extol the virtues of
plainness and spontaneity, for he argues in his Orator that the orator’s first duty is to teach (L.
probare) his hearers, which demands the plain style. Cicero is certainly aware that unclear
messages miss their mark, yet he is especially fond of an embellished style that both delights (L.
delecat) and moves (L. flectit) an audience. Cicero adds a refined aesthetic taste to his
description of the ideal orator, whose natural gifts for speaking assist him in knowing what to say
and when to say it, but whose rhetorical training teaches him how to say it. The sophistic strain in
Cicero’s treatment of style becomes apparent in De Oratore, in which he spends a great deal of
time on the aesthetics of rhythm, balance, and studied diction:

A knowledge of a vast number of things is necessary, without which volubility of
words is empty and ridiculous; speech itself is to be formed, not merely by
choice, but by careful construction of words; and all the emotions of the mind,
which nature has given to man, must be intimately known; for all the force and art of speaking must be employed in allaying or exciting the feelings of those who listen. To this must be added a certain portion of grace and wit, learning worthy of a well-bred man, and quickness and brevity in replying as well as attacking, accompanied with a refined decorum and urbanity. (10)

Cicero adds one caveat to his introductory remarks about the orator’s sense of rhetorical decorum and aesthetic refinement, however. Students of rhetoric must not have the same aspirations as students of the other arts. When other artists perfect their craft, they very noticeably exceed the skill of ordinary people. When orators perfect their craft, on the other hand, their skill becomes less apparent. None should notice the orator’s craft, for as Cicero writes, “the cardinal sin [in rhetoric] is to depart from the language of everyday life and the usage approved by the sense of the community” (10). His suggestion is that the orator’s skill recedes into the background of convention; however, he complicates this suggestion by adding that the orator must strike a balance between the four cardinal virtues of good style: correct diction (latine), lucid prose (plane), agreeable embellishment (ornate), and situational appropriateness (apte). Cicero notes that while correct diction and lucid prose are relatively easy to learn, stylistic and rhetorical propriety are elusive concepts. In his treatment of a genuinely “sophisticated” rhetoric, Cicero recovers the Sophists’ emphasis on the aesthetics of style, but with particular aesthetic principles in mind. Cicero’s “pleasure principle” trades on Aristotle’s mimetic view of rhetoric—that people delight in seeing things represented as they are (or as they believe them to be). But Cicero also adds in the manner of Gorgias that ornate style delights its hearers and moves their emotions only within conventional limits. He pairs embellishment (ornate) and appropriateness (apte) to show that no one style suits all causes, audiences, or occasions.
Cicero’s fondness for studied eloquence and ornate style shows that he embraces the “situational” rhetoric of the Sophists. While this sophistic influence would seem to inform the aesthetic principles of his rhetoric, a very different kind of propriety informs his ethics. In fact, there is a “neo-Stoic” bent to Cicero’s thinking on ethics that counters the sophistic tendencies in his aesthetic and rhetorical thinking. McKenna locates this Stoic undercurrent in Cicero’s thinking on ethics specifically in his *De Officiis*, where Cicero posits a form of moral propriety that is natural, not social. Cicero begins with the premise that “humans are distinguished from animals not only by their capacity for reason, but, as an entailment of this, by their possession of ‘a feeling for order, for propriety [quod deceat], [and] for moderation in word and deed’” (14; qtd. in McKenna 49). Cicero claims that propriety is knowable apart from cultural constructs, that there is something in human nature that predisposes it to propriety. Man’s proclivity for order and moderation presupposes that some measure exists beyond or outside of cultural variation.

Cicero’s reluctance to theorize propriety as a rhetorical concept also appears in his ethics. Like Aristotle, whose rhetoric and ethics are based in the middle style and the middle way or “golden mean,” respectively, Cicero’s understands ethical propriety as an outcome of one of the four cardinal virtues: temperance. But like Aristotle, who categorized *phronēsis* as the basis for all the other moral virtues, Cicero claims that propriety functions in relation to all the moral virtues: wisdom, justice, fortitude, and temperance. Knowledge of one of these virtues leads to knowledge of the others, so that the appearance of virtue is attended by the appearance of propriety.

Cicero achieves a dialectical conflation of Stoic ethical tendencies and sophistic rhetorical tendencies in his understanding of propriety. Natural propriety, or a predilection for order and moderation, separates humankind from the other animals, and it is man’s capacity for rational judgment that serves as the precondition for moral consciousness, for his acquisition of the four cardinal moral virtues. Social propriety, on the other hand, serves as evidence of these
moral virtues, as a kind of practical or apparent virtue. Like Aristotle’s concept of *phronēsis*, Cicero’s concept of *decorum* so informs moral and civic virtue that it is difficult to discuss apart from individual occurrences. For Cicero, propriety is “perfectly self-evident and does not require any abstruse process of reasoning to see it,” for like the appearance of virtue, people know it when they see it. Continuing this line of reasoning, he argues that “there is a certain element of propriety perceptible in every act of moral rectitude; and this can be separated from virtue theoretically better than it can be practically” (95). In his conception of rhetorical and ethical *decorum*, Cicero conflates the various Hellenistic notions of propriety he inherited. First, propriety’s “self-evidence” suggests the “pretechnical” *conspicuous appearance*, in that, the appearance of the appropriate in speech or action reveals something about the character of the speaker or actor. Second, this appearance of the appropriate becomes the measure of the man who would speak or act. Finally, because the measure cannot be adequately separated from the special circumstances in which the speech or action occurs, both the orator and his hearers require the practical wisdom to discern it. Cicero effectively closes the circle between rhetorical and ethical propriety to discover a “rhetorical ethics,” a sensible ethics whose basis Cicero (and Aristotle) locate in the speaker’s ability to survey his speaking situation to find the most appropriate speech.

Cicero’s influence during the middle ages can be literally felt in the conflicted writings of early church fathers like St. Jerome and St. Augustine, both of whom read Cicero with an uneasy fervor. Jerome claims that in his search for the ascetic life, it troubled his soul more to forgo the library of classics he had collected while in Rome than to leave behind his family and friends and the delicious food he had grown accustomed to eating. The famous fever-induced vision Jerome had during the Lenten season reveals the strange influence Cicero had upon him. Jerome dreams that his body fails him at the height of his fever and that, after his death, he is brought before the judgment seat of God. The Judge asks him who and what he is, and Jerome replies, “I am a
Christian.” The Judge calls him a liar, saying that Jerome is a Ciceronian, not a Christian, and he orders that Jerome be scourged. Jerome recalls being tortured more by the scourge of his conscience than by the scourging of his body, and so, upon awaking, he repents his indulgence in Ciceronian eloquence, vowing to return to the wisdom of the Scriptures. Augustine likewise makes an attempt to stop reading Cicero, whose artistry and eloquence at first moves him much more than the simple eloquence of the Scriptures. Augustine’s response is less tortured than Jerome’s, however, for he envisions a middle ground between Ciceronian and Christian rhetoric in which he can dialectically reconcile the one to the other. To effect this reconciliation, Augustine not only broadens his understanding of eloquence so that Scripture has a unique place in his repertoire, but he also baptizes Cicero for Christian eloquence, using much that he had learned from Cicero’s treatises on rhetoric to write *On Christian Doctrine*, his own treatise on the rhetoric of the preaching arts. Whereas Jerome cuts himself off from Cicero, Augustine brings Cicero into the fold of Christian rhetoric.

Cicero has an even greater influence in the Renaissance, when his works were recovered in the humanists’ classical program of education. Humanist education was grounded in the trivium, in which students were primarily trained in the language arts of grammar, rhetoric, and logic. Built into this educational program was also training in ethics. Like Cicero, humanists took the pairing of rhetoric and ethics to its logical conclusion. Students’ rhetorical training largely consisted of exercises in which they would develop and defend arguments on classical problems, such as Helen’s choice to leave Sparta and join Paris in Troy. Reading over Isocrates’ and Gorgias’ respective encomia of Helen to prime their thinking, students would at first defend and then condemn Helen’s choice. These exercises would not only afford them opportunities to draw on their rhetorical training, but also position them to make ethical choices. What these exercises really constituted was training in rhetorical and ethical prudence. Victoria Kahn examines this
tendency of humanist rhetorical training in her book, *Rhetoric, Prudence, and Skepticism in the Renaissance*. Kahn is interested in the connection between language use and the concept of prudence, as it first gets articulated in Aristotle’s *Nichomachean Ethics* and later gets taken up by Renaissance humanists, who, like Aristotle, inherited the ethical questions surrounding the study and practice of rhetoric. Kahn approaches prudence primarily as a rhetorical concept and so translates Aristotle’s use of the term prudence (Gr. φρόνησις) in his *Ethics* as “practical judgment” or “practical wisdom.” For Kahn, prudence is “ratiocination or reflection about the best course of action appropriate to the achievement of a particular end” (18). Because ratiocination and reflection presuppose language as the medium through which the *virtue* of prudence is realized makes prudence both an ethical and a rhetorical concept for Aristotle, as well as for Kahn. Kahn’s definition of prudence, as she understands it in Aristotle’s *Ethics*, overlaps nicely with Aristotle’s definition of the purpose and end of rhetoric as “an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion” (1355a1). At the heart of these two definitional statements is the orator who surveys his speaking situation and deliberates before selecting a particular course of speech or action. At this point the many options open to the

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11 McKenna finds traces of skepticism in sophistic rhetoric, specifically in the sophistic rhetorician’s radical contextualization of meaning. The sophistic rhetorician and skeptical philosopher both approach knowledge as “situated,” which McKenna discovers, for example, in the sophistic rhetoric and skeptical philosophy of Gorgias:

Propriety was not merely a rhetorical concept for Gorgias, but, like *kairos*, it was consistent with a skeptical epistemology that extended to his ethics and aesthetics as well (Untersteiner, 198). The tenets of his *On Nature*—that (1) nothing exists; (2) if it did it would be unknowable; and (3) if it were, it would be incommunicable—fit with a theory of rhetoric as the use of nonlogical and/or nonlinguistic aspects of emotional appeal, style, rhythm, delivery, and the adaptation of these to both conventional mores and the situation at hand. Paradoxically, this anti-epistemology would further imply the need to act rhetorically as if the tragic incoherence of reality were not the case: to act, that is, as if speech were persuasive precisely because it is widely held to be an accurate means of communicating things about reality. (31)

Gorgias’ radical skepticism renders rhetorical propriety theoretically elusive, enmeshed as it is in rhetorical situation. For Gorgias, language does not mirror reality (the “mimetic” view); nor does language create reality (the “expressive” view); nor does language approximate some higher reality (the “pietistic” view). Language seems to be the only *conventional* means of communicating anything about reality, whose very existence is questionable because philosophically unknowable. Gorgias’ basing his view of rhetoric in stylistic and social convention paradoxically renders the art eminently teachable.
speaker are only “potential speech”—and only potential speech inasmuch as the orator has wisdom and experience enough to choose the most appropriate discourse from the possibilities open to him. The decision assumes that the orator can read accurately and respond appropriately to the rhetorical situation and its many contingencies. Such is the nature of rhetorical prudence.

In much of her work, Kahn focuses her attention exclusively on humanist rhetoric, claiming that the early humanists intended to train their students to exercise their practical judgment whenever and upon whatever they read. Part of the humanist program was to teach people civic virtue and responsibility by teaching them to entertain a problem or proposition fully before rendering judgment. Early humanists defined what they considered an “ideal reader,” who, not unlike Cicero’s “ideal orator,” would consider a problem from several perspectives or weigh evidence both for and against a proposition before settling on what he understood as the “truth” of the matter. The only difference between ideal reading and ideal oratory is the time each takes to render applicable, appropriate judgment, which of course leads humanists to believe that ideal reading can be taught, even if ideal oratory remains conceptually elusive. The movement that the reader’s exercises would take mimics the rhetorical practice of arguing in utramque partem (on either side of the case or problem in question), which is not only one of the hallmarks of Ciceronian rhetoric but also of Renaissance skepticism. Kahn achieves this pairing of humanist

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12 It is interesting to note that the method of utramque partem mimics in a monological utterance what Socrates’ dialectical method aimed to accomplish dialogically: that is, to explore both sides of an issue fully before rendering judgment. In De oratore, Cicero argues for the union of dialectic and rhetoric, wisdom and eloquence in the person of the orator, lamenting the fact that the eloquent being separated by Socrates from the learned . . . and this distinction being continued by all followers of Socrates, the philosophers disregarded eloquence, and the orators philosophy; nor did they at all encroach upon each other’s provinces, except that the orators borrowed from the philosophers, and the philosophers from the orators, such things as they would have taken from the common stock if they had been inclined to remain in their pristine union. (212) Cicero follows Aristotle by approaching the art of rhetoric dialectically, drawing on concepts otherwise relegated to the province of philosophy. If Aristotle achieved a dialectical analysis of the art in theory, Cicero achieved a dialectical demonstration of the art in practice, for he was largely concerned with technique. Quintilian’s Institutes marks a return to theory for the elucidation of the art in the education of the orator.
and skeptical rhetoric in the notion of rhetorical prudence. The prudent person aims at practical truth “within the contingent realm of human life [where] the genuine exchange of ideas and opposing arguments in rhetorical debate will elicit [what] we know as consensus” (36). What Kahn does not examine, however, are the existing standards or measures by which various problems are solved, propositions are tested and proved, and the practical truths which spring from rhetorical debate are finally reached. Implied in consensus are certain standards for interpretation and judgment that the group has determined good, rational, and true, and it is by these standards or principles that other truths are weighed and discovered. Because practical truth is arrived at through practice, the standards for interpretation and judgment (i.e. discursive norms, cultural mores, or social conventions) are wrapped up with prudence (as practice) and set up the very possibility for consensus and social cohesion around the truth in question. Underwriting the humanist/skeptical practice of arguing both sides of an issue in their texts, then, is the assumption that in utrumque partem serves as the most appropriate method for arriving at practical truth or judgment.

The skepticism inherent in humanists’ practical training in rhetoric and ethics anticipates a “modern” cast of mind that would eventually usher in the disappearance of rhetoric’s pairing with ethics as subjects central to early modern educational programs. If Cicero’s notion of rhetorical decorum serves as a turning point in rhetoric where the materials of rhetoric, ethics, and aesthetics can be said to meet, then humanist philosophy inherits these materials, but does little to separate them. Humanists embraced the idea that the style in which a speaker fashions his speech not only conveys the character of the speaker, but also shapes the character of his audience. This exchange of êthos presupposes a practical pairing of rhetoric and ethics, and it implies an aesthetic, since it is the style of the discourse that both the speaker and audience attend to most. If as the common idiom states, “the style makes the man,” then the Renaissance humanist intended
to make himself through his style, as Stephen Greenblatt implies in the phrase “Renaissance self-fashioning.” However, the stylist always invents upon a model, which is what leads Hanna Gray to conclude in “Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence” that rhetorical decorum was inseparable from imitatio in humanist thought, that indeed it was its “exact analogue.” This fusion of Ciceronian ethics and eloquence, Gray argues, was “not due to any particular philosophical conviction; it was their philosophy” (506). That the decorous model existed to be reshaped by others meant that in the hands of the verbal or prose stylist, the “appropriate” could be refashioned anew to fit new occasions and circumstances.

The humanist program of cultivating civic virtue thus drew on a practical or active rhetoric, ethics, and aesthetics. Because humanists made this implicit position in Cicero’s writing explicit in their rhetorical training, rhetorical propriety after the humanists tended to develop in one of two directions. The first emphasized the imitative nature of rhetorical propriety, so that rhetorical propriety was hypostatized in technical or stylistic concepts such as Thomas Wilson’s “aptnesse” (191) and George Puttenham’s “seemelynesse” (269). As purely technical considerations, however, these rhetorical concepts were divorced from their philosophical groundings. The second direction was a critical response to the first, for advocates of the second direction claimed that advocates of the first “fetishized” the style and forgot the matter of their discourse. These writers preferred discursive clarity to stylistic propriety and began to consider methodological propriety as the more sophisticated answer to the prose stylists’ mere consideration of rhetorical technique. Writers such as Petrus Ramus and Francis Bacon advanced their methods on philosophical grounds. Ramus, for instance, appealed to the clarity and simplicity of his dialectical method, with which he sought to replace the classical rhetorical canons of invention and disposition. Francis Bacon and the “new philosophers,” as John Donne named them, charged Renaissance writers with “hunt[ing] more after words than matter” (26). In
Novum Organum and The Advancement of Learning, respectively, Bacon aimed to improve the clarity of English to disseminate knowledge and appealed to the kind of inductive proof that would later develop into an eminently teachable scientific method. It is largely because of Bacon and the new philosophers that rhetoric and ethics—or rather the “rhetorical ethics” that Aristotle analyzed and Cicero developed—all but disappear in the methods adopted by the modern social sciences and taught in new educational programs. As a way of discoursing about natural and social phenomena, scientific method contains a sense of rhetorical propriety motivated by an ideal of stylistic transparency. Discursive clarity comes to be standardized and later institutionalized as a means to epistemological certainty and scientific truth.

Stylistic and methodological reform did not end with the new philosophers, however. The period’s preachers advanced similar arguments in their effort to “open” the Scriptures to their congregations; they followed the preaching manuals’ advice to aim for clarity first. Each of these reformers of style sought stylistic transparency for very different reasons: Ramus, Bacon, and the new philosophers following him because they wanted to convey a reality independent from humanity, not constituted by it; and the preachers because they wanted to convey the Scriptures’ meaning unmediated by the mind and hand of man, the Scriptures true meaning as intended by the Holy Spirit. Thus, the call for clarity that largely characterized the stylistic reforms of the 17th century also abetted scientific and religious reforms during the same period, and it is the treatment and development of perspicuity and propriety in stylistic “plainness” as both rhetorical and ethical concerns, particularly in the writing of Puritans, that is the focus of the chapters that follow.

13 That Bacon sees his New Organon replacing Aristotle’s “Old” Organon shifts the focus of the debate from manner to matter, from language form to language content as key epistemological concerns.

14 The suggestion that stylistic reform—specifically, a push for stylistic plainness—becomes the “register” for several important historical developments, not the least of which is the birth of scientific method, the origin of the capitalist ethos, and the rise of the Protestant Reformation, gets articulated in various
This brief overview of the central place rhetorical propriety holds in classical rhetorical tradition reveals that studies of rhetorical propriety are fraught with tensions and contradictions. Modern rhetoricians like Stanley Fish and Stephen McKenna have struggled to theorize rhetorical propriety and posit a usable methodology. Both rhetoricians have largely followed classical rhetorical tradition in noting that propriety resists easy definition and raises more questions than it answers. Whereas Fish radically contextualizes rhetorical propriety in rhetorical situation, McKenna theorizes rhetorical propriety as it gets realized in Aristotle’s rhetorical appeals. Fish appears to arrive at Gorgias’ conclusion that the “rules” of rhetorical propriety are so enmeshed in specific rhetorical situations that they cannot be adequately, or usefully, separated from their situation to be meaningfully studied. Fish’s skepticism does not have the same philosophical source as Gorgias’, however. Gorgias’ skepticism was grounded upon his questioning of reality, not its mediation; and yet, as McKenna points out, Gorgias paradoxically arrives at the conclusion that it is through cultural conventions that orators learn the “rules” of rhetorical propriety. Fish’s skepticism, on the other hand, derives from a culturally pluralist view of rhetorical situation, whereby Fish posits as many “grammars” or “rules of propriety” as there are rhetorical situations, so many in fact that rhetorical propriety is either beyond theorizing or not worth theorizing. By questioning the usefulness of teaching rhetorical situation, and rhetorical propriety by extension, Fish questions the very propriety of rhetoric—its status and use as an art. Fish’s radically

commentators’ treatments of plain style during the period. The birth of the scientific method and the historically coincident call for stylistic and liturgical plainness during the Protestant Reformation, for instance, Christine Mason Sutherland treats at some length in her essay, “Reforms of Style: St. Augustine and the Seventeenth Century.” Max Weber, of course, examines the rise of the capitalist ethos in Protestant work ethic in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Among other considerations, Weber is interested in the concept of “rationalization”—the scientific calculation of human action—and how it came to replace custom and tradition, on the one hand, and morality and emotion, on the other hand, as an account of human motive in the turn from Enlightenment philosophy to modern social sciences. Marxists following Weber, like Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, have studied the dehumanizing effects of what they have termed “the instrumentalization of reason,” which Adorno and Horkheimer have specifically traced in Dialectic of Enlightenment to Enlightenment philosophy’s abolishment of myth and superstition, which all but severed the “enlightened age” from the customs, traditions, morality, and emotions of a previous age—a kind of “negative freedom.”
sophistic view of the art does indeed complicate the materials and rules of the art, for he “pluralizes” the traditional view of the language arts in grammars, rhetorics, and logics; however, as McKenna’s survey and study of rhetorical propriety shows, a determinate number of materials can be defined to render the art of rhetoric useful, even if McKenna’s understanding of rhetorical propriety reifies in audience sympathy.

These tensions—tensions that are still being grappled within the field of rhetoric—warrant a dialectical approach to the art, which suggests a return to Aristotle in order to examine Aristotle’s “idealist” blind spot. Plato argued that a legitimate art of rhetoric would offer a dialectical analysis of its purpose and materials, its ends and means, in order to accurately define its nature and uses. Aristotle responds to Plato’s argument with his *Rhetoric* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, which outline a more or less complete view of rhetoric and rhetorical prudence, respectively. McKenna’s parsing of Aristotle’s argumentative appeals helps to clarify rhetorical propriety by its effects: The *logical* appeal offers an epistemological approach to rhetorical propriety, for it bases stylistic suitability in clear perception through the senses, especially vision. The *ethical* appeal offers an ethical approach to rhetorical propriety, for stylistic suitability gets measured against or becomes the measure of the speaker’s appearance or character. The *pathetic* appeal offers an aesthetic approach to rhetorical propriety, for stylistic suitability becomes the material means of hearers’ psychological or emotional responses to speech. McKenna’s focus on aesthetic response not only marginalizes, by increasing degrees, the ethical and epistemological elements inherent in rhetorical propriety, but also leaves relatively unexplored the idealist blind spot in Aristotle’s consideration of the art: rhetorical propriety’s basis in the cosmic or natural order. After Plato, Cicero was the first major philosopher of rhetoric to return to a “natural” rhetorical propriety in humans’ very basic predilection for order and moderation in word and action. Cicero did much to reunite wisdom and eloquence in an idealist sense—in the person of
the “perfect” or “complete” orator—but demonstrates in rhetorical technique the very rudiments of his art. Cicero’s *De Oratore* and *De Officiis* at once illustrate the art by use of the art. In part what attracted humanist educators to Ciceronian rhetoric was its subtlety, its uniting of Platonic idealism and Aristotelian realism in the concept of rhetorical propriety, which spans oratorical, epistemological, ethical, aesthetical and even moral concerns.

Cicero’s writings on rhetoric thus offer a dialectical pairing of Platonic and Aristotelian views of both rhetorical propriety and the propriety of rhetoric. That Ciceronian rhetoric has enjoyed such lasting influence through the middle ages, Renaissance, early modern period, and well into the modern period is due in large part to his interesting mixture of idealist and materialist approaches to the art. Rhetorical tradition, however, has increasingly accepted realist, materialist views of rhetorical propriety, leaving relatively unexplored the very idealist views that gave rise to them in dialectical method. Idealist views have been either dismissed as ideological or relegated to the province of religious study when, in fact, the tensions between idealist and realist views of propriety surface most clearly in religious rhetoric. For instance, in his seminal study of the term, *Mimesis*, Erich Auerbach brought together rhetorical and poetical traditions that modern literary critics have since sought to divorce: the Hebraic or “sacred” literary tradition and the Hellenic or “secular” literary tradition. As Robert Alter argues in his Introduction to *The Literary Guide to the Bible*,

Auerbach showed that the old simple contrasts between Hebraism and Hellenism were misleading, that the realisms invented by writers of the Bible were at least as important to the European future as was the literature of ancient Greece. It was no longer a matter of equating conduct with Hebraism and culture with Hellenism; and when the Bible could be seen as a source of aesthetic value, vast new questions opened, not only about revising the relations of Greek and
Hebraic, but also about the exploration of texts that paradoxically had been neglected even as they were venerated and studied. (4)

Auerbach traced the Hebraic and Hellenistic tensions at the heart of European culture, which warrants bringing “conduct” and “culture” together within the purview of rhetorical propriety. The dialectics of Hebraic “conduct” and Hellenist “culture” find their clearest expression in Christian rhetoric. As Alter argues, not only can the Bible be seen as a source of aesthetic value for pulpit rhetoric and religious poetry, but Biblicists can be seen as skilled rhetoricians and poets in their own right. Once contradictory terms, “puritan rhetoric” and “puritan poetics” offer the very idealist-realist tensions that rhetorical tradition has largely dismissed in favor of Aristotle’s “realist” depiction of the art. Rhetoricians have drawn their understanding of rhetorical propriety from classical rhetoric and philosophy and have largely disregarded church rhetoric as the place where many of the tensions collected in the concept of rhetorical propriety surface and get worked out. Christian rhetoric offers a place for examining rhetorical propriety that is dialectical in its movement simply because the term “Christian rhetoric” already carries tensions between faith and persuasion, piety and propriety. Puritans’ uneasy relationship to the language art of rhetoric thus renders rhetorical propriety less elusive a concept than rhetoricians have traditionally theorized it.¹⁵

¹⁵ Richard Lanham’s contention that rhetorical propriety is “a pious fraud, the ‘social trick’ par excellence” (46) leaves little room for a dialectical understanding of rhetorical propriety, a methodologically useful understanding of the concept that accounts for the negotiation of discursive standards in moral or ethical language practice. Lanham locates rhetorical propriety exclusively with audience, claiming that “[d]ecorum is a gestalt established in the perceiving intelligence” (46); however, contrary to scientific method, which carries a sense of rhetorical propriety that privileges discursive clarity as a means to objectivity and epistemological certainty, religious rhetoric carries a sense of rhetorical propriety that privileges discursive clarity, but rather as a means of conveying believers’ subjective moods, or the mind’s vacillation between faith and uncertainty.
Chapter 1 examines Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine*, which is one of the first full treatments of Christian rhetoric and a distinctly Christian sense of rhetorical propriety. In this treatise, Augustine draws heavily on Cicero’s oratorical offices in his preaching offices and Cicero’s perfect orator in the person of his Christian orator. Augustine works with the propriety of rhetoric in his baptism of pagan rhetorical tradition for Christian ends, and his treatise serves as a dialectical treatment of the tensions between classical and Christian rhetoric. First in his *Confessions* and then in *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine develops an “aesthetical epistemology” in which he imagines the “language art” of rhetoric carrying both aesthetic and epistemological qualities. His treatise is also a dialectical treatment of the “philosophy” of rhetoric, whereby he discovers that Christian ethics and morality come to mediate his early classical philosophical understanding of aesthetics and epistemology. Augustine’s aesthetical epistemology divorces the aesthetic qualities of rhetoric, such as style and presentation, from its epistemological qualities, such as invention and arrangement, in order to show that both are needed in the work of the preacher, and discovers in Scripture aesthetic and epistemological warrant (and precedent) for using Christian rhetoric. Augustine terms his aesthetical warrant “preaching” and his epistemological warrant “teaching,” which he bases in exegetical content, and he argues in *On Christian Doctrine* that both exegesis and preaching require knowledge of classical grammar and stylistic elements already fully treated by the classical rhetoricians. Augustine thus develops a sense of propriety, which implies both Christian piety and rhetorical propriety, from the central place Scripture rhetoric holds in his belief system.

Chapter 2 examines the influence Augustine’s *Confessions* and *On Christian Doctrine* had on Puritan writers’ understanding of Christian piety and rhetorical propriety, until Ramist philosophy arose to offer Puritans an epistemological method virtually emptied of aesthetical concerns. The Miller-Bercovitch debate over Puritans’ use of typology in place of allegory offers
ample evidence that Puritans largely embraced Augustine’s use of typological rhetoric as a valid exegetical approach; however, the debate also reveals that Puritans were less comfortable with Augustine’s use of Ciceronian rhetoric for the presentation of exegetical content. They returned instead to the Socratic position on rhetoric, stressing the Neoplatonism they found in Augustine’s writings on Christian piety, which they grounded in the writings of Paul. Puritans’ Socratic cast of mind led them to Ramist dialectic as a method of invention and arrangement divorced from the Ciceronian concern with the style of discourse. Augustine’s typological rhetoric offered Puritans a distinctly Christian rhetoric, for he discovers the substance of his typological readings of the Bible and the Book of Nature in *caritas*, or Christian love, and argues that every reading ought to be motivated, first, by man’s love of God and, second, by man’s love of God as creator of everything around him, including himself. Piety mediates Augustine’s early aesthetical epistemology, for he discovers in Scripture rhetoric beautiful and pleasing forms and a unified way of discoursing about the world. Most Puritans thus embraced Augustine’s sense of piety, but rejected his Ciceronian influence, preferring instead a Socratic-Pauline understanding of rhetoric, for which they turned to Ramist dialectic. Ciceronian rhetoric nevertheless makes its way into Christian rhetoric, including the Ramist system, just as it had made its way into Augustine’s notion of Christian rhetoric.

Chapter 3 examines William Perkins’ *The Art of Prophesying* and *The Calling of the Ministry*, two treatises which realize both the epistemological and aesthetical concerns of the Puritans, for in these texts, Perkins offers an exegetical method steeped in typological readings of Scripture and a preaching method framed by Ramist dialectic. Perkins thus questions the propriety of Christian rhetoric as Augustine had expounded it in *On Christian Doctrine*: Perkins’ preaching manual follows the same organizational structure as Augustine’s, opening with exegetical method and closing with presentation or preaching method, and Perkins also
emphasizes typology in the very title of this work, approaching typology as an “art” whereby the preacher interprets Scripture as prophesy and fulfillment. In order to convey unmediated exegetical content, however, Perkins offers a method of presentation virtually emptied of aesthetical concerns. For his method, he uses Ramist dialectic, by which the preacher offers a binary logic of invention and arrangement entirely based in Scriptural rhetoric that is typological and analogical in its movement: approaching Scripture as prophesy and fulfillment; clarifying Scriptural complexity by comparison to other passages; offering doctrine by reason of its uses or application. Perkins’ manual comes to replace Augustine’s as the Puritans’ guide to the exegetical and preaching arts, and yet it recalls much that Augustine offers in *On Christian Doctrine*. Perkins’ Socratic-Ramist emphasis on dialectic in place of rhetoric does much to divorce epistemology from aesthetics in Puritans’ language practices, which Puritans found in Paul’s injunction that preachers use stylistic plainness in their preaching, even though stylistic plainness still requires rhetorical competence and metaphorical language. Whereas Augustine’s aesthetical or Ciceronian approach offered a way to *hear* the Word of God, Perkins and Puritans following his manual found in Ramist dialectic an epistemological approach to Scripture that helped them to *see* the Word of God. The dialectic of hearing and seeing returns us to the Sophistic-Socratic traditions and their debates over rhetoric-as-epistemology and dialectic-as-epistemology. Perkins offers a slightly different inflection than Augustine, but finds that he cannot entirely empty his dialectical approach of rhetorical, stylistic, and aesthetic concerns. The sophistic elements of Ciceronian rhetoric still find their way into Perkins’ treatment of preaching, though these elements can already be found in Scripture, which, in its Hebraic-Hellenic conflation, offers ways of both hearing and seeing/reading the Word of God.

Chapter 4 focuses on how translators and preachers of Scripture share similar exegetical and presentation concerns. The two major radically “Protestant” translations of Scripture, the
Geneva and KJV, offer prefaces in which the translators defend the propriety of their translation by making appeals to Scriptural precedent and pious motives. The Geneva translators aimed to limit readers’ exegetical license by clearly delimiting the range of interpretations in their translation and its marginal notes. The Geneva translators’ understanding of rhetorical propriety was therefore tied directly to a clear translation, with a distinctly Calvinist bent, and plainly articulated marginal notes that offered limited exegetical content to clarify difficult passages. The KJV translators, on the other hand, offered a translation that would appeal to the prudence of individual readers and hearers. That the KJV was written to be read aloud suggests the translators had its rhetorical effects in mind when they were making aesthetic and stylistic choices. The KJV translators’ understanding of rhetorical propriety was more classical or “humanistic” in its appeal, for they limited marginalia in their translation, even as they aimed at stylistic clarity. Bible translators of the period drew on other bible translations in the production of their own and turned to classical and contemporary translation theories as their methodological warrant. Because there was no unified theory of translation during the period, early modern translators looked to classical translation as their model, which was based upon classical rhetorical theory; in fact, translation was very much a part of the classical educational program in rhetoric, for the humanist educational program was adapted from the classical model, which included translation as part of students’ training in the language arts of grammar and rhetoric. Whereas the Geneva translators privileged interpretive clarity, and so emphasized “teaching” among the three classical, Ciceronian oratorical offices, the KJV translators privileged clarity, to be sure, but added “delighting” and “moving” to the oratorical office of “teaching” largely because the KJV was written for public performance. Both texts arise from very different religio-political situations, and so they realize very different religio-political motives; however, both texts mediate classical and contemporary translation theories, which offer various methods for striking a balance
between the “letter” and “spirit” of the text, or rather between the “word” and “sense” of the source language and its replication in the target language.

Translators work out the tensions between the language arts of rhetoric and poetry, for they translate to teach and delight. These very tensions between sermon or preaching rhetoric and poetics can be seen in Milton’s prose writings and poetry, and especially in his epics *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, which are the focus of Chapter 5. Both epics offer sermon rhetoric in highly moving poetical style, and yet it is in these epics that Milton works out the tensions between the classical, Ciceronian rhetoric he had been taught in the humanist program of education and the clarity he finds in logical demonstration. Milton thus understands aesthetics as an extension of epistemology in his view of rhetorical propriety. Jameela Lares argues in *Milton and the Preaching Arts* that Milton’s early training as a preacher shaped his career as a poet; however, Lares neither treats Milton’s Ramist influence at any great length nor his privileging of logic above rhetoric in the language arts. Milton takes a Ramist approach to poetic invention and disposition most clearly in his prose tracts. Dialectic becomes for Milton a “contracted palm” whereby he seizes and examines an idea, and rhetoric an “open hand” whereby he presents the idea to others. Milton’s epics offer a typological reading of Scripture, more specifically focusing on the *kairotic* failure of Christian rhetoric and its fulfillment in Christ. Milton is especially interested in the failure of *kairotic* propriety in *Paradise Lost* as humanity’s aspiring to intuitive reason before its time and Christ’s recovery of *kairotic* propriety in *Paradise Regained* when, despite Satan’s questioning, he awaits God’s providential revelation faithfully, patiently, and obediently. Milton understands “right reason” as a dialectical rhetoric in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, respectively, and his privileging of logic above rhetoric comes to serve as the substance of his Christian ethic—Milton’s Christ in *Paradise Regained* serving to model the Christian orator’s use of logic. Milton’s poetry thus offers a unique, but inherently Ramist
aesthetical epistemology, for Milton follows Ramus in his understanding of rhetorical propriety, whereby he privileges the idea to its presentation, and so privileges logic to rhetoric. However, Milton also understands the uses of sophistic rhetoric in developing a delightful and moving presentation of an idea—that preaching and poetry delight and move even as they teach. Like Perkins, who could not entirely empty his sermon manual of Ciceronian influences, Milton embraced Ciceronian rhetoric (and other classical models) as a means to moving and delighting an audience. In Milton’s mind, Christian education should teach the language arts of logic and rhetoric as “counterpart arts,” but Milton was still partial to logic as the first step toward “right reason.”

Chapter 6 examines Taylor’s career as a preacher-poet, which takes a different course than Milton’s career. Whereas Milton takes a rhetorical approach to his poetics, Taylor takes a poetical approach to his sermon writing. Taylor’s *Preparatory Meditations* serve as the place where Taylor works out his sermon rhetoric and clarifies his understanding of Scripture by moving himself to, and delighting in, the heights of Christian communion. Taylor therefore understands aesthetics as a vehicle to epistemology in his view of rhetorical propriety. Taylor’s *Preparatory Meditations* offer sermon rhetoric based in typology—a highly complex referential system which he uses to clarify his understanding of the doctrine of justification that he might preach it in sermons delivered upon his approach to the Lord’s Supper. Taylor writes his meditative poetry for himself, but it is highly rhetorical in its concerns: Taylor’s typological and other referential word play renders Scripture a closed referential system, and yet he discovers in his pairings of the Word with Christ’s body in the rite of communion that Scripture not only offers infinite poetical content, but also models a perfect poetry and rhetoric that he can only desire to delineate. Like Milton’s Christ, who is Milton’s model or perfect orator, Taylor desires perfect rhetorical communion with Christ’s Word-body—the kind of epistemological clarity and
aesthetic delight only achieved in the hereafter. Meditation, which Taylor envisions as a kind of “pre-communion,” is designed to achieve both epistemological clarity and aesthetic delight. Taylor delights in complex Word-word play, but this complexity clarifies his sermon materials, especially the doctrine of justification of which he and his congregants are unworthy. Even Taylor’s early love poetry to his wife Elizabeth bears the aesthetic hallmarks of the later meditations, suggesting that even before his poetic voice reached maturity in the Preparatory Meditations, Taylor imagined the sacrament of communion as a physical-sexual-conjugal “marriage union.” In both the early and later poetry, then, desire for perfect communion with and in Christ is Taylor’s poetical and rhetorical motive: perfect poetical communion with Christ’s real body in prayer and meditation in anticipation of the hereafter, and perfect rhetorical communion with his congregation—or Christ’s metaphorical body in the church—in his sermon. Both poem and sermon have epistemological and aesthetical tensions of which Taylor is acutely aware as he tries to trace the outline of Christ-as-Word in both poem and sermon.

Much of the scholarship on Puritan rhetoric and poetics in recent years has tended to be historical rather than conceptual in its approach. I offer instead a theoretical concept that extends the traditional work done in rhetorical approaches to literature.16 The concept of “propriety” and its methodological application “the rhetoric of propriety” has yet to be applied to the literature of the seventeenth century, and this project will serve as a proving ground for its wider application to other literary periods and other literary traditions. As it applies to the seventeenth century and to English and American Puritan literary traditions more specifically, the method will add much to literary scholars’ understandings of plain style. Much of the work done on plain style largely examines it from the perspective of clarity as the chief rhetorical concern. Examining plain style from the perceptive of propriety, on the other hand, will help to elucidate the “peculiarities” of

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16 See the Conclusion “The Rhetoric of Propriety: Towards a Dialectical Method of Reading” for a full explication of propriety as methodology.
Puritan rhetoric and poetics, for it shows precisely where rhetoric, ethics, and aesthetics can be said to meet in Puritan writing.

The increasing separation of rhetoric from literature in recent years has largely turned literary scholars away from utilizing rhetorical concepts to analyze literature. This project offers a new rhetorical approach to literature to add to existing rhetorical approaches to literature and will, I hope, do much to clarify rhetoricians’ understanding of two rhetorical concepts that seem to overlap: rhetorical propriety and rhetorical prudence. Apart from Victoria Kahn, who traces the concept of rhetorical prudence through the literature of the early English Renaissance in her book, *Rhetoric, Prudence, and Skepticism in the Renaissance*, no scholar to my knowledge has discussed Aristotle’s notion of rhetorical propriety, which he defines alongside clarity in his *Rhetoric* as one of the chief excellences of language use, and how it differs from rhetorical prudence, which he defines in his *Nicomachean Ethics* as the capacity of a speaker to discover the best means to virtuous speech and action. In *Adam Smith: The Rhetoric of Propriety*, Steven J. McKenna cites Kahn’s use of the concept of rhetorical prudence in his discussion of propriety in the writing of Adam Smith and his contemporaries, but he does not adequately separate the concept of rhetorical prudence from rhetorical propriety, nor does he adequately examine the rhetorical history of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially the humanist-Protestant tensions at the heart of the stylistic turn to plain style in the seventeenth century. Part of my contribution to the field of rhetoric, then, is not only to show where the rhetorical concepts of prudence and propriety meet and perhaps overlap, but also to show how these concepts differ from one another in the writing of Protestant preachers and poets.17

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17 Rhetoricians are still debating the “situated” quality of rhetoric and how rhetor and audience simultaneously shape and are shaped by past rhetorical situations as well as by the present rhetorical situation that renders them rhetor and audience, respectively, which is apparent in a recent essay published in *College Composition and Communication*. In the essay, titled “Rhetorical Agency as Emergent and Enacted,” Marilyn Cooper examines the role agency and intention play in rhetorical situation, specifically
deliberative or political rhetorical situations. Cooper notes that agency is shared between rhetor and audience—not unlike authority is shared between writer and reader—and that persuasion does not occur without the tacit agreement that both parties are free to choose their response to the rhetorical situation and so each has a share in the outcome. Cooper calls this dynamic between rhetor and audience and the present surrounds they share (i.e. the rhetorical situation) and the historical surrounds they may or may not share (i.e. experiences and emotions that comprise character or identity) an “ecological rhetoric,” which suggests a dialectical relationship among rhetor, audience, and rhetorical situations past and present. Of particular note in Cooper’s essay is her citation of Latour’s attribution of deliberative oratorial skill to “moralists,” who, Latour believes, “rather than knowing what must be done and not done, know instead that no one knows for certain and for all time what must be done (Politics 156). Cooper argues that it is the uncertainty occasioned by a sense of morality that opens up the possibility for an ethical or responsible rhetoric, which suggests that ethos arises from the rhetor’s uncertainty or skepticism about the value of a course of action he would persuade his audience to take. For Cooper, the ethical rhetor assumes his own and his audience’s possible “fallibility” at the outset, which also suggests the moralist’s understanding that his rhetoric is always-already a fallen rhetoric. Cooper’s essay offers both timely and sufficient warrant for a reexamination of the Christian-humanism at the heart of Puritan rhetoric and poetics, an examination that approaches the Puritan ethos as an interesting and complex dialectical pairing of Ciceronian prudence and Christian propriety.


Sutherland, Christine Mason. “Reforms of Style: St. Augustine and the Seventeenth Century.


Chapter 1

Rhetorical Propriety in Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine*:

Towards a Unified Method of Scriptural Interpretation and Presentation

In the opening pages of *The New England Mind*, Perry Miller argues that Augustine “exerted the greatest single influence upon Puritan thought next to that of the Bible itself” (4). Miller locates the source of Augustine’s influence in the very human expression Augustine gives to the practice of Christian piety, particularly in his *Confessions*, for it is in his *Confessions* that Augustine relates his search for Christian faith, or rather his search for the appropriate language in which to express his Christian faith. What Augustine is after in the *Confessions* is a “peculiar” kind of eloquence, one whereby he might become convicted of his faith and, by writing of his doubts and struggles with his conversion to Christianity, perhaps strengthen the faith of his readers. Miller thus finds the source of Augustine’s influence upon Puritanism not only in Augustine’s practice of Christian piety, but also in his desire to “externalize and systematize [its] subjective mood” (5). Augustine’s desire to externalize and systematize his understanding of Christian piety became a search for a “rhetoric” with which he might give form and meaning to habits of mind that would have otherwise eluded him. Like the Puritans following him, Augustine seeks in his *Confessions* evidence of God’s grace, or rather the personal conviction that he is an unworthy recipient of God’s glory, and a common language in which to properly express to fellow Christians this language of the soul—that they too might discover a similar conviction.¹⁸

¹⁸ David W. Tracy traces in “Charity, Obscurity, Clarity: Augustine’s Search for a True Rhetoric” Augustine’s different uses of rhetoric throughout his writing career. He finds in Augustine’s early writings an “apologetic rhetoric,” in his middle writings a “rhetoric of conversion,” and in his late writings,
Coupled with the Bible, Augustine’s *Confessions* thus offered Puritan readers a rhetoric of Christian piety, for prior to his conversion, Augustine had been a rhetorician and language philosopher.\(^\text{19}\) Having been trained in the liberal arts, which were the mark of a cultivated man, Augustine had an extensive knowledge of literature, rhetoric, and dialectic and later excelled as an orator. For a number of years before his conversion, Augustine taught rhetoric to students in Thagaste, where he opened his own school; in Carthage, where he moved to get closer to the center of the western empire; in Rome, where he heard student fees were higher and the students

especially in the fourth book of *On Christian Doctrine*, a “rhetoric of *inventio* as a key moment in any Christian persuasion to action,” a “rhetoric of invention” Augustine used to deliberate upon “both *res et signa* for correct rhetorical-theological interpretation” (143). Tracy examines Augustine’s notion of *caritas* as the “transformational principle” underwriting not only the converted individual’s “new search for the true discovery of wisdom and happiness,” but also the exegetical and rhetorical basis for the preacher’s hope and faith in converting others. Tracy writes,

That transformation is *caritas*: since God’s grace-*agape* is sheerly given, it frees the *eros* of our necessary drive to wisdom and happiness to the new synthesis of *caritas* and, therefore, new possibilities for the discovery of true wisdom and true happiness. This transformational principle of *caritas* would seem to suggest that, for Augustine, rhetorical discovery (*inventio*) is entirely a matter of the proper *ethos*. But even aside from the notorious (or, at least, anti-Quintillian [sic]) problem of the preacher who does not, alas, practice what is preached (book 4), this strictly *ethos* reading does not seem to hit the mark on how *caritas* also transforms the *logos* of the Christian rhetorician for the discovery of true understanding. (136)

I address Tracy’s concern in my Introduction, “The Rhetoric of Propriety and the Propriety of Rhetoric,” particularly in my examination of Aristotle’s notion of rhetorical prudence compared to rhetorical propriety—how it is exactly that *ethos* might also be considered a *logical* concern, especially seeing as it was Aristotle who first located *ethos* in the speech itself (i.e. in *logos*). For Aristotle, dialectic and rhetoric are “counterpart arts,” and he carries this pairing into his *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he writes that prudence is the one virtue that prepares for the mastery of all the other virtues. The prudent man acts and speaks well because he knows the good and looks for the good in his rhetorical situation. Aristotle’s famous definition of rhetoric as the speaker’s “ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion” (1355a1) must be revised in light of his definition of rhetorical prudence as the *sine qua non* of virtuous action and speech: The prudent speaker’s available means of persuasion are limited to those means that would move an audience to virtue and knowledge of the good. Aristotle’s prudent man adds an element to Quintilian’s notion of the “complete orator” as “the good man speaking well.” Aristotle’s “prudent orator” is “the good man who speaks well because he observes the good as the *only* available means of persuasion.” For Augustine, then, the principle virtue of Christian oratory—love or charity—does not just render the preacher’s behavior appropriate to his charge; rather, *caritas* realigns his perception of true happiness and wisdom so that his thoughts, words, and actions are all directed toward this same end.\(^\text{19}\) Gerard Watson argues in “Saint Augustine’s Theory of Language” that Augustine had a deeper and more sophisticated understanding of language than language philosophers like Wittgenstein had credited him. Tracing Augustine’s theory of language back through Cicero (namely, Cicero’s *Academica*) to the Stoics, Watson demonstrates that Augustine understood signs as intrinsic to human nature and understood language as a part of human sensation and perception. In Augustine’s view of language, the sounds of words appeal to the senses, to human sensation, and thus to the physical realm of experience; the meanings of words appeal to thought, to human perception, and thus to the spiritual realm of the soul.
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es more tractable than in Carthage; and finally in Milan, where he fled to escape the dishonesty of his Roman students. It was in Milan that Augustine met Ambrose, who was bishop there, and became enamored of Ambrose’s vast knowledge and the eloquence with which he preached the gospel. Augustine describes his sermon style as unlike anything he had ever heard before, and he learned from Ambrose a new method for reading and interpreting the Bible. While Ambrose certainly had a hand in Augustine’s conversion and later aversion to anything pagan, Augustine admits at several points in his *Confessions* that his reading of one such pagan, Cicero, shaped both his speaking style and his understanding of the role philosophy plays in the life of an intellectual.

Up until this point, Augustine’s studies at Carthage had been preparing him for a position of distinction as an advocate in the law courts. To cultivate the eloquence necessary to distinguish himself as a lawyer, however, Augustine tells us that he studied many books on style, which he confesses doing only to reach two “damnable and conceited” ends: He learned the art of eloquence so that he might mock or deceive his audience, given that, as he understood it, in the law courts “one’s reputation is high in proportion to one’s success in deceiving people” (38). He also learned eloquence purely for the delight he took in language itself, a kind of pleasure he later came to censure as arising from “human vanity” (38). Nevertheless, Augustine does not entirely condemn his instruction in eloquence, for it was this kind of reading that led him to Cicero. Cicero on style, in other words, led him to Cicero on philosophy:

Following the usual curriculum [says Augustine] I had already come across a book by a certain Cicero, whose language (but not his heart) almost everyone admires. That book of his contains an exhortation to study philosophy and is titled *Hortensius*. The book changed my feelings. It altered my prayers, Lord, to
be towards you yourself. It gave me different values and priorities…I was impressed not by the book’s refining effect on my style and literary expression but by the content. (38-39)

Though Augustine was trained to be sensitive to the kind of eloquence Cicero was discussing in his treatises on rhetoric, his contact with Christianity moved him to value eloquence as little more than ornament, covering over a speech empty of content or truth. Actually, he became ever more distrustful of eloquence, associating it with the pagan world, so that although he discovered a kernel of truth in Cicero’s writings on philosophy, Augustine still considered Cicero as belonging to a culture that became increasingly foreign to him.

Influencing this change in Augustine’s stance on eloquence, of course, had been his contact with the Christian world and chiefly Bishop Ambrose, whose own eloquence Augustine characterized as emptied of ornament. Ambrose had adopted the plain and humble style of the Bible in his sermons, which was a language that even the lower classes, the uneducated, could understand. Like the Bible, Ambrose’s style was not merely for the proud; nor did it lay bare its content to the uninitiated. Rather, like the Bible, which yielded upon further reading “mountainous difficulty” “enveloped in mysteries” (40), Ambrose’s style was such that, while his hearers clearly understood the content of his sermon, they were left with the impression that they had just heard something profound. Augustine was no different; for Ambrose’s plain but profound speaking style moved him to contemplate the mysteries of the Bible. Part of Augustine’s conversion experience was based in reassessing the value of Scripture, the humble style of which he had formerly considered a major deterrent to the conversion of the educated and

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20 Augustine’s approach to faith as a form of reason can be gleaned from a Scriptural passage he often cites in the Confessions: “Behold, piety is wisdom” (Job 28:28). The Bible presents itself to the beginning reader as a lowly text with seemingly conflicting teachings, but as the reader matures in the faith, its message becomes clearer and yet more profound. The Bible’s meaning grows in proportion to the reader’s faith.
well-to-do classes. Much of Augustine’s discussion of education in the *Confessions* registers his working through the conflict between his pagan and Christian influences.

The *Confessions* thus presents Augustine’s initial dialectical pairing and examination of Christian piety and pagan rhetoric, but it is in his more mature writings, such as *On Christian Doctrine*, that Augustine’s analyzes the pair with more precision. Augustine admits in the *Confessions* that Cicero’s writings on eloquence led him read much more deeply Cicero’s writings on wisdom, in which Augustine began to note the Platonic character of Cicero’s philosophy. Cicero’s Platonic bent of mind led, at least in part, to Augustine’s conversion to Christianity, for Augustine was at first attracted to the similarities he found among neo-Platonist writings, the gospel writings, and the writings of Paul. He remarks in the *Confessions*, for instance, that

> Through a man puffed up with monstrous pride [i.e. Manlius Theodorus, a neo-Platonist who patronized Augustine at the time of his conversion], you [God] brought under my eye some books of the Platonists, translated from Greek into Latin. There I read, not of course in these words, but with entirely the same sense and supported by numerous and varied reasons, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” (121)

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21 James J. Murphy points out in “St. Augustine and the Debate about a Christian Rhetoric” that the contrast between the Word and word was one of the two central problems of consolidating the early Christian Church. The first problem facing the Church during Augustine’s lifetime was that it had to clearly define Christian doctrine to address the heretical attacks of Manicheans, Pelagians, Donatists, and Priscillianists. The second problem facing the Christian community was of equal importance, for in answering these heretical attacks, the Church had to define the cultural and intellectual basis for its leading men so that they could establish some cohesion among themselves and the wider community. Murphy explains that this second problem was “a matter of the greatest moment, for upon its success depended the training of future apologists to defend the doctrine against heresy, the formation of future poets to carry the Word of God to the people through literature, and the very education of the people themselves” (401). The basic issue for the Church in Augustine’s age was whether it should adopt contemporary Greco-Roman culture *in toto.*
Augustine’s early distancing of himself from Ciceronian rhetoric during his conversion to Christianity brings him full circle back to Cicero in his more mature writings to reflect upon how instrumental rhetoric was to his conversion and to investigate how instrumental rhetoric could be in the conversion of others. *On Christian Doctrine* serves, then, as Augustine’s first full treatment of the propriety of rhetoric in the preaching and teaching of Christian piety.

Augustine wrote *On Christian Doctrine* between 396 and 426, completing the first three books nearly twenty-five years before he resumed his work on the treatise with Book IV. During the hiatus, Augustine wrote his *Confessions*, in which he traces the evolution of his theology from an interesting mixture of Manichaeism and Greco-Roman philosophy. In the first three books of...
On Christian Doctrine  Augustine explicates his process of Scriptural exegesis, which of course includes his understanding of Scriptural “rhetoric.” In the fourth book, however, Augustine addresses more directly the place of classical rhetoric in Christian preaching. In Book IV, Augustine treats expression itself, or rather eloquence, though he cautions readers of his treatise that they should not look for a discussion of rhetorical precepts in this book. He directs such readers to other sources to learn the laws of rhetoric, sources which he does not name but which he admits the Christian teacher should not neglect if he is to teach eloquence to other Christians. After then outlining the qualities of an orator, Augustine advises that students of eloquence ought to take the very authors of the Holy Scriptures as their model, for they surpass even the greatest of pagan orators, including Cicero, in their joining of wisdom and eloquence. Of all the other qualities that contribute to good style, Augustine claims that “clarity” is essential for instruction, and so the Christian teacher ought to cultivate this quality before the rest.23 Above all, Christian

I hung on his diction in rapt attention, but remained bored and contemptuous of the subject matter. My pleasure was in the charm of his language . . . I was not interested in learning what [Ambrose] was talking about. My ears were only for his rhetorical technique; this empty concern was all that remained with me after I had lost any hope that a way to you [God] might lie open for man. Nevertheless together with the words which I was enjoying, the subject matter, in which I was unconcerned, came to make an entry to my mind. I could not separate them . . . Above all, I heard first one, then another, then many difficult passages in the Old Testament Scriptures figuratively interpreted, where I, by taking them literally, had found them to kill (2 Cor. 3:6). (88)

The problem of rhetoric that Augustine cites earlier in his Confessions comes to represent the spiritual problem that had delayed his conversion. At the crux of the problem was a God he could contemplate but never hope to contain within the scope of his imagination. Augustine confesses that Manichean materialism prevented his believing in what he later came to call spiritual understanding, the kind of understanding that presupposes faith because it accounts for the discursive limits of human thought as “fallen reason.” 23 See Fortin’s “Augustine and the Problem of Christian Rhetoric.” Fortin writes, “To teach, Augustine adds, again quoting Cicero, is a matter of necessity: docere necessitates est. To speak in a pleasing manner adds an element of charm to the orator’s words: delectare suavitatis. Finally, to persuade pertains to the triumph that the orator seeks for his client or his cause: flectere victoriae. The question is whether the ‘teaching’ to which On Christian Doctrine refers has anything in common with what Cicero originally intended by that term” (86). Fortin demonstrates that Augustine asserts the priority of teaching over the other two offices and that his own view of teaching, in contrast to Cicero’s, has nothing to do with the discourse’s apparent truth, whereby the orator’s instruction serves more as an instrument of persuasion, but rather with the discourse’s fidelity to Scriptural truth, whereby the preacher’s instruction serves to secure his audience’s belief in the “sound doctrine” of Scripture.
teachers must search after excellences of speech in earnest prayer, as gifts given by the grace of God, even as they must not neglect diligent study in order to acquire them. Stylistic excellence can only be achieved, says Augustine, if the style in which the speech is delivered is appropriate to the audience to which it is delivered; and so, following Aristotle and Cicero in this regard, Augustine suggests that the “propriety” of the speech is just as important as its “clarity,” or rather becomes both a necessary condition for the presence of clarity in the speech and the condition under which the speaker can be said to have spoken well.

Cicero’s Complete Orator to Augustine’s Christian Orator:

Augustine’s Conversion from Natural to Scriptural Wisdom and Eloquence

At the opening of Book IV, Augustine revisits the division of On Christian Doctrine he had outlined in his Preface—namely, the “two things on which all interpretation of Scripture depends: the process of discovering what we need to learn, and the process of presenting what we have learnt” (101). Books I-III Augustine devoted more or less exclusively to the process of discovering in the Scriptures what the Christian must learn. In several places, however, he anticipates Book IV, which he devotes solely to the presentation of the Scriptures in both teaching and preaching. He closes Book III, the last book on discovering, encouraging exegetes to pray for understanding; he closes Book IV with a similar injunction to preachers, encouraging them to pray for the most effective kind of presentation. With these two imperatives, Augustine recasts the classical debates over the use of eloquence to impart wisdom to an audience. In the first imperative—that exegetes should pray for understanding—Augustine shifts from the wisdom
classical writers sought in the practice of philosophy to the wisdom Christians ought to discover in reading the Scriptures.

Augustine allows for the reading of philosophy, particularly Platonic philosophy, but only because it helps one understand Pauline doctrine; he also allows for other Greco-Roman arts whose end for the writers of antiquity was wisdom, but only as a way to discover Biblical truths. In the second imperative—that preachers should pray for the most effective kind of presentation—Augustine shifts from the eloquence he had learned and later taught in the pagan schools to the eloquence a Christian orator must use only to open the Scriptural message to his audience. He allows for the use of the classical rhetorical arts only insofar as they are measured with humility and understanding. The preacher must have first opened the Scriptures to himself if he is to open them to others, which is why Augustine devotes a full three books to the exegetical art of understanding. That he closes his treatment of exegesis with an injunction to pray shows the exegete that his understanding comes directly from God and that he must accept this gift with thanks and humility. In Book IV, then, Augustine shows the preacher the importance of uniting wisdom with eloquence to open the Scriptures to others and that he must once again accept this gift of rhetorical propriety with thanks and humility.

Augustine unites wisdom and eloquence in the person of the Christian orator, his preacher-teacher of the Word of God. His notion of the Christian orator hinges directly upon

24 Charles Sears Baldwin studies Book IV of Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine* in his essay “St. Augustine on Preaching,” concluding that Augustine “begins rhetoric anew” by rejecting the pedagogy of the Second Sophistic and returning to the true spirit of Ciceronian rhetoric. Baldwin argues that Augustine cites Cicero cautiously in his treatment of the preaching arts in *On Christian Doctrine*, adapting Cicero’s *officia* to distinctly Christian ends. Augustine’s rejection of sophistic rhetoric, whose end was to please an audience, developed directly from homiletical tradition, whose end was to teach and persuade an audience. This is not to say that Augustine’s Christianized rhetoric did not aim to please; rather, he subordinated pleasing to teaching and persuading.

25 In “The Dialectic of Orality and Literacy,” John D. Schaeffer charges scholars as diverse as Christine Sutherland, Thomas Sloane, and Stanley Fish with focusing too much on Book IV of *On Christian*
Aristotle’s two chief excellences of language, clarity and propriety, which Augustine would have learned from his reading of Cicero. For Augustine, the Christian orator is first and foremost a man of ethos. Following his disclaimer to his readers that they should not expect a rhetorical treatise in Book IV, Augustine mentions that the rhetorical arts are not without good uses, but that they must be learned separately from his book—“assuming that a person of good character has the time to learn them on top of everything else” (101). Augustine adds, however, that it is often the case that preachers of the Word do not live according to the law, even though it was by sound teaching of the law that they filled their episcopal seats. Even if by their lives they show that they seek their own ends, Augustine admits that their words are not without profit to those who would listen: “good, faithful men listen with obedience not to a particular speaker, but to their Lord, who says, ‘Do what they say, but do not do what they do; for they do not practice what they preach’ [Matt. 23:3]” (142). The wise and eloquent speaker who leads a wicked life may educate those who are eager to learn the way to truth from him, for it is not with him but with Christ that Augustine locates the source of truth. Augustine again locates the wicked man’s wisdom and eloquence with God, seemingly sidestepping the classical debates over whether a man wicked in

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26 Following Cicero, Quintilian defines his “ideal orator” as “a good man who speaks well.”
27 Augustine is of course aware that one of his favorite metaphorical expressions in the Scriptures—the Word-made-flesh in Christ—not only refers to the spirit of God in the inspired Word of the Scriptures, but also refers to the “rhetorical” ministry of Christ, which unites perfect wisdom and eloquence in the gospel. Moreover, Augustine is also aware that Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition from Aristotle down reinterpreted rhetorical ethos—or the character and soul of the speaker—as also residing in the speech itself, in logos, which for Augustine includes the Logos as the spiritual source of and Christ as moral-ethical model for Christian orator’s own rhetorical practice.
his heart could ever be wise and eloquent, and whether eloquence has any use if put to wicked ends.

Although Augustine acknowledges that it is better for an ineloquent man to speak the truth badly than a bad man to speak falsehood eloquently, he argues that the false orator really uses something that is not his to begin with. He remarks that there are more eloquent men preaching the truth than there are men teaching the truth, which is the same as saying that there are more men who have been granted the gift of eloquence than there are men who have been granted the gift of understanding. The true Christian orator, not unlike Cicero’s “perfect” or “complete orator” or Quintilian’s “ideal orator,” is a man hard to come by, a man in whom wisdom and eloquence are aligned indeed. “More important than any amount of grandeur of style to those of us who seek to be listened to with obedience,” Augustine concludes, “is the life of the speaker” (142). Ethos is of paramount importance if the speaker is to prove a Christian orator; that is, he must be Christian in both word and deed, for his actions back the truth of his words.

Those who are eloquent and yet disregard the Scriptures’ message by leading dissolute lives are using an eloquence that is not their own. For Augustine, wisdom and eloquence cannot be severed. Good and bad men alike speak eloquently only because the Holy Spirit speaks through them. The difference is that the good man knows something of which he speaks, and so thanks God that he has been given both understanding and the ability to teach it; the bad man knows nothing of which he speaks and thinks he himself possesses the eloquence which has been granted him.
Augustine thus treats the nature of rhetorical ethos as a matter of social and economic propriety.\footnote{Although “economic propriety” connotes the economic conditions that inform social relations, here and elsewhere I refer to a “spiritual economy” in which God serves as the sole proprietor. My contention, however, is that this spiritual economy does indeed have real, material consequences for the Christian authors embracing the concept, for these authors imagine not only their spiritual conditions, but also their real, material social relations in financial terms: the soul’s “debt” to Christ the “redeemer.” Augustine’s notion of caritas arises from the spiritual debt, but has material and social implications in its expression.} The Christian orator, the good man whose words and deeds are aligned, has the Scriptural wisdom to recognize that whatever efficacy his words might have on an audience cannot be traced to anything he himself has said or done, but rather to what the Spirit has said and done through him. He may study the rules of eloquence alongside the exegetical rules Augustine outlines in Books I-III, but a natural facility with language and the clarity of mind to understand the Scriptures belong to God and are his to bestow on whom he will. As Augustine admits, many men can be preachers of the Word; few are teachers; fewer still are preacher-teachers. The life of the Christian assumes a certain degree of understanding, principles the Christian practices in his everyday life. Teaching these principles to another assumes both understanding and eloquence—first understanding and then eloquence.

Curiously, the course of Augustine’s own career as a Christian orator, if we may take his own life as a model of one’s “practicing what he preaches,” took a direction exactly opposite the one he presents to readers of On Christian Doctrine. Augustine admits in his Confessions that he had shown an early facility with language when he was a young, had learned and taught the rhetorical arts in the pagan schools, and had demonstrated his oratorical competence in several competitions well before his conversion to Christianity. In short, he possessed eloquence before understanding, though he also admits that when he came to understanding through his conversion, he had to refine his notion of the source and nature of eloquence as well. Locating the source and nature of wisdom and eloquence with God alone, Augustine makes God the sole proprietor of the way to...
truth. Economic propriety thus informs social, rhetorical, and stylistic propriety in Augustine’s notion of the Christian orator: If the good man who understands the Scriptures’ message is to speak well, his thoughts, words, and actions must be aligned as a means to truth at once bestowed by God and directed back to God. The Christian orator’s sense of propriety arises from his knowledge that God’s Word underwrites his own when he “invents” upon the Scriptures; he returns to God what is already God’s, ever thankful that God accepts his meager discourse as recompense. The Christian orator’s wisdom and eloquence are, therefore, from and for God.

29 This dynamic recalls the concept of dulia et latria, in which God is understood as both origin and end, and it behooves the Christian to recognize this doctrine in all that he thinks, says, and does. Augustine develops the concept of vertical love (latria) as opposed horizontal love (dulia) in his aesthetic and ethical theories, which he discusses fairly early in the Confessions and develops further in his understanding of Christian rhetoric in Book IV of On Christian Doctrine. Augustine opens his ethical teachings by examining the relationship between parts and wholes, the antithesis of which he would have come across in the writings of the Neo-Platonist Porphyry and would have learned in his rhetorical training as an invention method for amplifying or clarifying discourse. He treats the philosophical grounds of his doctrine first. Given his Neo-Platonist leanings, Augustine envisioned all of God’s creation as a continuum of being with no empty spaces. In God’s creation nowhere, nothing, no one is without God’s presence, which Augustine considered being. For Augustine, being without God’s presence is a trick of the will, an illusion to which many are subject: “None loses you unless he abandons you, and when he abandons you where can he go or fly for refuge (Ps 138:7) unless it be to move from your serenity to your anger?” (61). The soul’s response to God’s presence is also the basis of the soul’s conversion, the soul’s turning toward God. Augustine saw being as integral, but existence as partial, the life of everything being subject to change and moving toward non-being:

For wherever the human soul turns itself, other than to you, it is fixed in sorrows, even if it is fixed upon beautiful things external to you and external to itself, which would nevertheless be nothing if they did not have their being from you . . . Not everything grows old, but everything dies. So when things rise and emerge into existence, the faster they grow to be, the quicker they rush toward non-being. That is the law limiting their being. So much have you [God] given them, namely to be parts of things which do not all have their being at the same moment, but by passing away and by successiveness, they all form the whole of which they are parts. That is the way our speech is constructed by sounds which are significant. What we say would not be complete if one word did not cease to exist when it has sounded its constituent parts, so that it can be succeeded by another. (61-62)

The analogy Augustine draws between life and death, time and syntax Reveals how much his training in the liberal arts, particularly his training in the language arts of grammar, rhetoric, and logic, informs his conversion theology. The individual’s relationship to the One, to the whole, to God he understands as the fluctuation of significant sounds in speech, as the materialization of individual phonemes whose momentary existence ends in the word.
Along with being a man of ethos who knows the good and the truth, Augustine borrows a page from the Scriptures when he adds that the Christian orator must also be a man who knows what is appropriate for his audience and shapes his discourse to suit his audience. Like the Scriptures he aims to open to his congregation, the Christian orator must know his congregation: their knowledge, their needs, their values, the circumstances of their lives, and the state of their souls. His speech and writing must meet these contingencies if he is to be heard and understood. Unlike the Scriptures, however, which obscure at one moment and make clear at another, the Christian orator must everywhere make his message clear and endeavor to delight his hearers at moments to hold their attention. For all of Augustine’s concern with the clarity and propriety of the Christian orator’s speech, he treats the grammatical and rhetorical arts only sparingly. Both arts, he claims, are not necessary to acquire eloquence, for there are many who are ignorant of these arts and yet are eloquent and others who know the rules of these arts and are not eloquent. The rules do not make a man eloquent, and Augustine makes every effort to separate eloquence from the rules of eloquence.

First, he questions whether aged people can learn to be eloquent from the rules. Following the Roman writers, he claims that if the rules of rhetoric cannot be learned quickly, they can never be properly learned at all. Studying rhetoric is for the young, and only if they have the time and inclination to devote themselves to it. Augustine encourages both young and old, however, to listen to speech of those who are eloquent, from which they will glean far more of eloquence by imitating than by studying its rules. The rules may govern, but cannot guarantee eloquence.

Second, readers of Christian literature, canonical or non-canonical, are everywhere presented with Christian eloquence. Just by turning their attention to the matters treated in these
writings, the reader “can become steeped in its eloquence, especially if this is combined with the
practice of writing or dictating, and eventually speaking, what is felt to be in conformity with the
rules of holiness and faith” (102). Readers of Scripture need not study the rules of eloquence, for
the Scriptures are themselves imbued with a properly humble eloquence. Those who would write
or speak the Scriptures’ message unwittingly learn the Scriptures’ eloquence.

Third, even if one were to memorize the rules of eloquence, Augustine answers that the
speaker does not apply these rules consciously to his discourse, no matter how stylized it appears,
especially if his discourse is to appear unrehearsed and unaffected. By “unrehearsed,” Augustine
does not here refer to a kind of Christian sprezzatura, which suggests deceit in the artist’s
seeming “nonchalance” in the practice of his art—an effort designed to conceal the art and make
the performance appear effortless. Rather, Augustine means to show that a speaker cannot think
of the rules of eloquence while he is delivering his speech, especially when he is speaking
extemporaneously, which is the kind of preaching Augustine has in mind. Considering the rules
while speaking might even cause the speaker to forget his speech. Augustine thus encourages
those who would learn the arts of rhetoric and grammar to learn them as children acquire
language; that is, by listening and imitating eloquent speech properly delivered and, later, reading
and imitating articulate writing properly written.

By advising the Christian orator to imitate eloquent men rather than study the rules of
elocution, Augustine draws heavily upon the classical approach to the orator’s education as
Cicero and Quintilian outlined it. As he does in the other books of On Christian Doctrine,
Augustine also adapts Cicero’s three oratorical offices to delineate the duties of his Christian orator. Cicero believed that the three duties of the orator were to teach (docere), to delight (delectare), and to move (flectere) his audience. Augustine also locates the duties of the Christian orator with the effect he has upon his audience, that he must be listened to with understanding, with pleasure, and with obedience; in short, the Christian orator must teach, delight, and move his audience. Augustine everywhere in his treatise privileges discursive clarity, for the preacher’s primary aim should be to teach the message of the Scriptures. Following this first duty, however, are the ancillary duties of delighting and moving, for which Augustine analyzes stylistic propriety. Because clarity and propriety are effects of good style, Augustine examines the stylistic principles that tend to make speech clear and appropriate: First, as he does elsewhere in the treatise, Augustine goes so far as to say that the rules of grammar are not always necessary as long as the message is clear. Having said as much in Book II, where he admits solecisms and barbarisms into speech if it renders its message clearer, Augustine again asks in Book IV, “What is the use of correct speech if it does not meet with the listener’s understanding?” (116). He advises the teacher to direct his words to the listener’s understanding, finding words that communicate a clear message, even if that means the teacher forsakes correct forms. Augustine prefers intelligible forms to correct forms; things are, in other words, more important than the

language served to create and sustain social bonds, but how it did so” (qtd. in Watson’s Cicero on Oratory and Orators xxiii). For classical rhetoricians, then, it was far more important to understand good practice then to extrapolate a theory from good practice.

31 It would appear, then, that Augustine’s Christian adaptation of Cicero’s oratorical offices is particularly apt, in that Cicero is already articulating the aesthetical epistemology Augustine theorizes as the basis of rhetorical propriety—as speech or writing that teaches the truth precisely by suiting the “spirit” of the message to the “letter” that conveys it and the audience that receives it, by taking into account the audience’s knowledge and spiritual needs, and yet delighting the audience by rendering that message fittingly and beautifully—simply because the orator himself knows that his audience is moved by what is fitting and beautiful.
signs that signify them. And yet, he qualifies his advice by granting that men knowledgeable in the art of grammar often please and move their audiences with the style of their speeches, deploying commata, cola, and periods to achieve a kind of “tasteful variety.” Tasteful cadences duly measured Augustine likens to a beautiful face whose symmetry and striking features please and move everyone who looks upon it—the face embodying Augustine’s sense of due or fitting proportions.

If expositors of the Scriptures are to teach popular audiences who, Augustine declares, are often slow to learn, they should use a style of exposition that removes obstacles impeding their listeners’ understanding first so that they might be moved to obedience. In pursuit of transparent speech, the teacher must use plain style to make his speech’s content plain to his listeners. Augustine explains the means by which speakers are led to adopt plain style, when they “neglect elegant vocabulary and consider not what sounds good but what is good for putting over and making clear what one has to say” (115). Here he cites Cicero as his source, referring to him as “a certain writer” who defines such discourse as “contrived casualness,” in which the speaker dispenses with verbal ornament to reach his audience by colloquial speech. Plain style’s purpose

32 In her article, “Reforms of Style: St. Augustine and the Seventeenth Century,” Sutherland emphasizes the disparities between the world in which St. Augustine lived and that of seventeenth-century “scientists” like Bacon, Sprat, and Sprat’s contemporaries, who with him formed the Royal Society. Sutherland defines Augustine’s world as predominantly “God-centered” and the world of Bacon et al. increasingly “man-centered” (27). While she might stress too much the epistemological differences between Augustine’s thought and the thought of the “new philosophers,” as John Donne had called them, Sutherland does point out that there are striking similarities between their ideas about the role of rhetoric, particularly style, in the dissemination of thought. Augustine prioritizes the thing signified over the word signifying it. For Augustine, the first duty of language is to communicate, and particularly when the goal of the speaker is to teach, Augustine recommends that the speaker use plain language over other, more embellished styles. In plain style the word disappears when it gives way to a mental image of the thing; such discourse is less “mediate.” The new philosophers also placed greater emphasis on the thing signified. Like Augustine, they privileged unostentatious language use, language that did not call attention to itself. The new philosophers also aimed for stylistic transparency, whereby language serves more as a “window on the world” than as a lens through which speakers and writers may refract reality. Plain style appealed to the new philosophers because through it they sought to convey a “scientific” reality “out there” in the world, not constituted by humanity but independent from it (35).
is to teach; its mode is clear and transparent speech. To give the effect of clear and transparent speech, however, the speaker must craft the speech given what he knows about his audience.

Some subjects, Augustine admits, cannot be rendered clearly for some people’s understanding. They are too complex, but for various reasons. He claims there are two kinds of complexity, one intentional and the other unintentional. Intentional complexity ends in what Augustine calls “healthy obscurity” (32), which challenges willing readers and listeners to engage more deeply with the Scriptures and arouses their enthusiasm for studying.33 “Healthy obscurity” may also cloud the minds of wicked listeners to make them aware of their confusion and either move them to humility and holiness or exclude them from the mysteries entirely. Unintentional complexity Augustine locates less with the plain speaker’s style than with the audience members’ capacity for understanding. He writes that expositors should endeavor

First and foremost in all their sermons to make themselves understood and to ensure, by means of the greatest possible clarity, that only the very slow fail to understand, and that the reason why anything that we say is not easily or quickly understood lies in the difficulty and complexity of the matters that we wish to explain and clarify, and not in our mode of expression. There are some things which are not understood, or barely understood, in themselves, no matter how

33 Augustine turns the problem of Scriptural obscurity and ambiguity on its head, claiming that the darker places of Scripture are indeed part of divine eloquence and the Scriptures’ rhetorical effect. Casual readers need the rigors of obscurity to train them to read Scripture rightly and to discipline their apparent pride into humility. Obscure passages also exert more seasoned readers by rescuing them from tedium of simplicity. Augustine thus considers the usefulness of obscurity and ambiguity: “I have no doubt that that this is all divinely predetermined, so that pride may be subdued by hard work and intellects which tend to despise things that are easily discovered may be rescued from boredom and reinvigorated” (32).
carefully they are expressed or how many times they are repeated by even the plainest of speakers. (115)

The proper response to this kind of complexity is not to treat the matter, unless the matter absolutely must be treated. Then, says Augustine, the teacher must assume in his audience a willingness to learn and endeavor with as much effort and argument as he himself deems necessary to instruct his listeners. Augustine encourages teachers to establish a sense of goodwill between themselves and their listeners and use every means they possess in their repertoire to clarify Scriptural obscurity. He, of course, assumes that the expositor understands the matter himself and has the rhetorical range to help others learn it too.

Augustine thus acknowledges that expositors of Scripture teach well when they shape their speech to meet the contingencies of their speaking situations. Speech is only as clear as the speaker himself clearly sees the substance of his speech. Making that substance clear to another presupposes the speaker sees his audience—their knowledge, values, and needs—as clearly as he sees the substance of the text he would explicate, and that he can shape his discourse to meet each contingency of his speaking situation appropriately. Meeting these contingencies properly means that the speaker has both prudence and propriety—that he possesses the practical wisdom to recognize the most appropriate discourse to suit his speaking situation and a large stylistic repertoire on which to draw to shape his discourse accordingly. That these contingencies of the speaking situation must be met in the *hic et nunc* means that the speaker’s sense of what is appropriate and his means of meeting it must happen with a certain degree of spontaneity. The speaker must have internalized the rules of grammar and eloquence such that he draws upon them without thinking about them simply because, by the time he thinks of applying the rules, the moment for their application will have already passed.
Therefore, Augustine claims that the rules of grammar and eloquence are best learned from imitating the speech of eloquent men rather than reading and applying their rules. By imitation, Augustine means simulating the speaking situation and speech so that novice speakers begin internalizing the sense of propriety master speakers have themselves discovered and apply effortlessly, without considering their “art.” Practical wisdom assumes “practiced” discourse—that the speaker has experienced certain speaking situations before, or ones very much like them, and thus recognizes in each case the available means of persuasion and applies those persuasive means that best meet the purpose of his discourse. Augustine unites wisdom and eloquence in the person of Christian orator, who possesses both prudence and a sense of propriety, prudence being the gift of virtuous sight granted the orator by the grace of God that he may “in each [particular] case, see the available means of persuasion,” and propriety being the wherewithal and natural (or rather God-given) verbal talent he employs to capitalize on his observations. Like the classical rhetoricians he follows, Augustine is aware that wisdom, as knowledge of the good, and eloquence, as the verbal means to move others to the good, can be learned by experience, but only insofar as the would-be Christian orator also possesses some natural ability given him by the grace of God. As a “shepherd” of fellow Christians, the minister preaches to teach, to direct his flock toward the good that is God. In this way, the Christian orator serves as an instrument of conversion. Where instruction gives way to presentation in Book IV, then, Augustine examines several species of style as language instruments variously suited to the various characters or spiritual states of Christians’ souls in order to demonstrate how propriety determines the “proper concerns” of each kind of style.

The style suited to instruct Augustine calls “restrained.” The style meant to delight Augustine names “intermediate.” The style intended to move Augustine terms “grand.” Once more, he follows Cicero in treating these different styles and how they meet their purposes,
audiences, and circumstances. Having already explicated the purpose and propriety of restrained style in his examination of plain style, Augustine moves to explicate when the intermediate and grand styles are appropriate. He says that the grand style is typically suited to important matters and, to be sure, since the preacher-teacher’s speech concerns the eternal life and death of the soul, his speech concerns matters of greatest import. However, says Augustine, he should not always speak of such matters using the grand style; rather he should “use the restrained style when teaching and the intermediate style when censuring or praising something. But when action must be taken and we are addressing those who ought to take it but are unwilling, then we must speak of what is important in the grand style” (125). The grand style moves recalcitrant minds to action. But, Augustine continues, what if the preacher’s subject matter is God? What is greater than God? One would think the preacher should use only the grand style when speaking of God, if he is to suit his speech to its substance. Augustine refutes the notion, showing that the preacher must rather use the restrained style to teach the intricate doctrine of the Holy Trinity in an effort to keep these complicated matters as comprehensible as he can. One would also think by this same logic that the preacher should praise God and his works using either the intermediate or grand style, since they are styles suited to praising and moving. But Augustine refutes this notion as well, claiming that it is a grand “display of attractive and brilliant oratory [that] appears in the mouth of the preacher who can praise God as far as is possible,” but quickly adds that “nobody praises God adequately [and] yet nobody fails to praise him in some way!” (126).³⁴ The Christian orator measures his style against what he deems appropriate, but given the grandeur of his topic, which suggests that he would universally employ grandiloquence to treat divinity properly, he

³⁴ Later Puritan writers, such as Edward Taylor, make their inadequate praise of God the substance of their preaching and their poetry. Much of Taylor’s poetry, for instance, attempts to work out the contradiction between earthly, limited discourse (man’s “lisp”) and Christ’s injunction to praise and “love God with all your heart with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37).
must also practice proper humility, knowing that his thoughts and language are already inadequate to the task.

Augustine thus concludes that the most appropriate style is the “mixed style,” which offers stylistic variation to hold its hearers’ attention, teaching in one place, delighting in another, and moving the audience to action where appropriate. Augustine here follows Aristotle, who draws the same conclusion in his treatment of the mixed style in his *Rhetoric*, and Cicero, who demonstrates the mixed style in *On the Orator* and *On Oratory*, respectively. Mixed style presupposes that the speaker knows when and where to use different styles—restrained, intermediate, and grand—to suit both the matter and the audience. The speaker has, in other words, a clear sense of stylistic propriety. Augustine adds to this a kind of stylistic propriety that comes to be identified with the very speaker or writer himself—a personal style that is peculiar to the individual. Augustine asks how the Scripture writers, whom he takes as his standard of “mixed style” “appropriately applied,” can be shown to be both wise and eloquent. He

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35 In Book I of the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle defines rhetoric as “an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion” (1355a1). Furthermore, in Book III of the *Rhetoric*, where Aristotle gives his full treatment of style, he writes,

To make a further requirement of style that it should be pleasant and elevated is superfluous. For why that, rather than chaste or liberal or any other virtue of character? The things discussed will make the style pleasant if the virtue of *lexis* has been rightly defined. For otherwise, what is the point of being clear and not flat, but appropriate? For if it is luxuriant, it is not clear, nor if it is concise. But it is clear that the mean is suitable. And the things mentioned will make style pleasant, if they are well mingled: the conventional and the strange, and rhythm, and persuasiveness from propriety. (1414a6)

Following Aristotle almost to the letter, Augustine writes in Book IV of *On Christian Doctrine*,

The general function of eloquence, in any of these three styles, is to speak in a manner fitted to persuade, and the aim is to persuade people, by speaking, of what you are trying to put over so in any of these three styles the eloquent speaker speaks in a manner fitted to persuade, and if he fails to persuade he has not achieved the main aim of his eloquence. . . . It follows that we should use embellishment of the middle style thoughtfully, and not ostentatiously, not content with its aim of simply delighting an audience but rather intent to ensure that it helps them towards the good action which is the object of our persuasion. (140)
demonstrates that their writing, in that it is divinely inspired, comes to represent perfect wisdom and eloquence not only in its clarity (i.e. that its message is understood) but also in its propriety (i.e. that its message is properly understood and could not have been written any other way and achieved the same effects.) Augustine writes,

\[T\]he question is a very easy one to answer. For when I understand these authors not only can I conceive of nothing wiser; I can conceive of nothing more eloquent. Indeed, I venture to say that all who correctly understand what these writers are saying realize at the same time that it would not have been right for them to express it any other way. For just as there is one kind of eloquence appropriate to the young, and another kind appropriate to the old—and we should not call it eloquence if it does not match the status of the speaker—so there is a kind of eloquence appropriate to writers who enjoy the highest authority and the full measure of divine inspiration. They spoke in their own particular style, and it would be inappropriate for them to have used any other style, or for others to have used theirs. It is appropriate to them, and the humbler it seems, the more thoroughly it transcends that of others, not in grandiloquence but in substance.

(106)

Answering this question as he does, Augustine seems to raise the question whether it is even appropriate for one man’s eloquence to be imitated by another man who is learning what it means to be eloquent. Eloquent men are indeed eloquent not only because their speech and writing is inspired, but also because they have used a style of speech and writing that is peculiar to them alone.
As he does in the preceding passage, Augustine explains in several other passages in Book IV that the speaker should aim to “satisfy his audience with things rather than words, and not regard any matter as better expressed than another unless it is truthfully expressed” (143). The speech’s “truth value” supersedes any ornament the speaker would clothe it in. In fact, if the speaker is to remove his very words as obstacles to truth, he should adapt his words to suit his own station, to suit the matter about which he speaks, to suit the audience he addresses, and to suit the circumstances in which he speaks. To address each of these contingencies wisely and eloquently means that the speaker has properly mastered the mixed style. Augustine repeats, following Aristotle, whose literary style he characterized in his Academics as a “river of gold,” Cicero repeats in his treatise On Oratory much of what Aristotle has to say about style, placing particular emphasis on the propriety of the speech, for which he felt a natural talent in the speaker is indispensable. In fact, he develops Aristotle’s claim that the persuasiveness of a speech springs chiefly from its appropriateness, from which, Cicero claims, the extraordinary “magnitude and difficulty” of the art derives (10). For Cicero, eloquence presupposes that the orator has both vast knowledge, in various areas, and the kind of sensitivity to people and places that only comes from a sense of decorum and respectability. He says of knowledge, I am of this opinion, that no one is to be numbered among orators who is not thoroughly accomplished in all branches of knowledge requisite for a man of good breeding; and though we may not put forward such knowledge in conversation, yet it is apparent, and indeed evident, whether we are destitute of it, or have acquired it. (24)

No one style will answer to and cover every speaking situation, so that a part of propriety has to do with adjusting the style to the subject, the audience, and the occasion of the speech. Like Aristotle, Cicero is certainly sensitive to the fact that the orator’s rhetorical situation—the topic, audience, purpose, and circumstances of a speech—determines what will be deemed “appropriate.” Yet unlike Aristotle, who praises the “middle way,” Cicero would seem to favor a kind of eloquence that develops out of studied diction and embellishment. Without such close and careful study of diverse subjects, one never cultivates a style in Cicero’s sense of the term. As he contends in On Oratory, A knowledge of a vast number of things is necessary, without which volubility of words is empty and ridiculous; speech itself is to be formed, not merely by choice, but by careful construction of words; and all the emotions of the mind, which nature has given to man, must be intimately known; for all the force and art of speaking must be employed in allaying or exciting the feelings of those who listen. To this must be added a certain portion of grace and wit, learning worthy of a well-bred man, and quickness and brevity in replying as well as attacking, accompanied with a refined decorum and urbanity. (10)

Whereas Aristotle privileges clarity and appropriateness as his two main principles for achieving excellence in eloquence, Cicero pulls clarity within the purview of knowledge, claiming that the “careful construction of words” assumes “knowledge of a vast number of things,” and he pulls eloquence within the purview of propriety, claiming that a “portion of grace and wit” assumes a certain pedigree and refinement. For Cicero, sensitivity to the nuances of any social situation presupposes good breeding.
“Again, in the mouth of the Christian speaker the eloquence of the mixed style is not left without embellishment or embellished inappropriately” (142) and later concludes, “Surely, then, the art of speaking both eloquently and wisely is a matter of using adequate words in the restrained style, striking words in the mixed style, and powerful words in the grand style, but using them of things that are true and need to be heard” (144). The general function of all three styles Augustine defines and for which he offers several examples is to speak in a manner fitted to persuade, while at the same time keeping in mind the three duties of the preacher’s office: to be listened to with understanding, with pleasure, and with obedience. Augustine aligns the duties of Cicero’s orator with the duties of the Christian preacher to create the duties of the Christian orator.

Augustine makes it a crucial point of his treatment of the mixed style to distinguish it from grand style. He acknowledges the emotional force grand style often conveys to its audience, but he cautions preachers not to use it for its own sake, for that ends in overly affected style, but rather to allow it to grow directly from the subject matter. Again, things take precedence to words, as if the things themselves carried of their own accord a kind of eloquence “naturally” appropriate to them. Augustine thus defines the difference between the mixed and grand style:

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37 In his analysis of Augustine’s place in the Ciceronian tradition, Michael Leff argues that Augustine adopted Cicero’s belief in a kind of “natural eloquence” that stems directly from the material of discourse, the ideas themselves. Augustine accepted Cicero’s basic premise that wisdom and eloquence were unitary and that one ought never to separate materia from forma. For Cicero, grand style arises from grand thinking, a natural pairing of word and thought as natural as pairing thought and action: “An abundant supply of matter,” writes Cicero in On Oratory, “begets an abundant supply of words, and if the subjects discussed are themselves of an elevated character, a spontaneous brilliance of style results….So easily will nature of herself, given training and a plentiful supply of matter, find her way without any guidance to the adornments of oratory.” Leff concludes his discussion of Cicero’s belief in natural eloquence by examining Cicero’s corollary belief in the “priority of practice over theoretical instruction” (4). Given Cicero’s pragmatism, Leff positions him closer to the imitative pedagogy of Isocrates than to the systematic theory of Aristotle. Leff’s positioning of Cicero close to Isocrates makes his rhetoric no more sophistic than Augustine’s own, however, for Cicero (and Augustine) sought a rhetoric that would repair the form-content union where sophistic rhetoricians and the Socratic philosophers sought to sever them.
What especially differentiates the grand style from the mixed style is that it is not so much embellished with verbal ornament as inflamed by heartfelt emotion. It has room for almost all those ornaments, but if they are not there they are not missed. It is borne along by its own momentum, and derives its beauty of expression, if indeed this emerges from the power of its subject-matter, and not the pursuit of elegance. It is sufficiently equipped for its purpose if appropriate words follow not from a search for elaborate vocabulary but from the promptings of a passionate heart. (129)

Following Cicero, Augustine here argues that a speech’s style must suit not only its subject matter, but also the spirit or intent of the speaker. Thus, the grand style suits a subject that has emotional power and about which the speaker feels very passionately. It is only fitting that the speaker style his speech to convey the very emotional force the subject warrants and passion it naturally evokes in him. Rhetorical propriety also means suiting the style to the hearer that he may feel the same passion about the subject that the speaker does, but feel it by the power of the speech, not necessarily because he felt so disposed toward the subject matter before hearing the speech.

Augustine envisions the orator’s calling up, or rather calling upon, all the elements of the speaking situation to suit them to his rhetorical purpose, and indeed, like Cicero’s writings on the nature of eloquence, Augustine demonstrates in his own writing style the very style he treats. He uses the mixed style judiciously in his discussion of eloquence, not wanting to appear the stylist himself and by using momentary grandiloquence, unwittingly draw the attention of his critics. As he admits, “I am anxious to avoid giving the impression of showmanship in my discussion, but I had to reply to the ill-educated people who think our [Christian] authors contemptible not because
they do not possess the eloquence that our critics are so inordinately fond of, but because they do not make a show of it” (110). Elsewhere he speaks of his facility with the grand style in his sermons, by which he intended to move his audience not to applause but to atonement. He again admits, “I did not think I had achieved anything when I heard them applaud, but only when I saw them in tears. Their applause showed that they were receiving instruction and experiencing delight; their tears that they were moved” (139). Augustine cautions preachers to use the grand style sparingly and never for its own sake.

Augustine’s Christian orator mirrors Cicero’s complete orator in every way, save that the Christian orator has internalized a sense of propriety that can be traced directly to his sense of humility. This sense of humility Augustine traces to the Christian inversion of pagan values. The speech of Christ and the writings of Paul best demonstrate this inversion. Christ inverts the “the way to truth” in the gospels, saying, for instance, to those who follow his example that the first will be the last. Augustine takes both Christ and Paul as masters of eloquence, whose wisdom he locates in their humble delivery of God’s message. Like them, his aim is to invert the common understanding of truth, as well as the methods his contemporaries used to present it. For Augustine, understanding and eloquence are not the teacher-preacher’s own gifts, but gifts from God. As such, the Christian orator must use his gifts not for his own praise, but to praise God and move his audience to do the same—even though he realizes that his and others’ praise is always already inadequate. This later becomes the problem of the religious poet: trying to find language adequate to praise the Creator and His works.

In this way, the Christian orator never saturates his speech with eloquence, for a speech awash with eloquence often misleads its audience. Listeners become enamored by the speech and miss its substance, something even ancient teachers of rhetoric noted in their textbooks: “This
point,” says Augustine, “did not escape even those who believed in teaching the art of rhetoric; they declared that wisdom without eloquence was of little value to society but that eloquence without wisdom was generally speaking a great nuisance, and never beneficial” (104). The kind of practical wisdom that Augustine claims should be paired with eloquence so that the preacher might best meet his rhetorical ends grows beyond the immediate rhetorical situation to affect the larger social situation. Stylistic displays are little more than a species of sophistry, which classical writers deemed a nuisance to society. Augustine adds that even they recognized this truth without knowledge of the true wisdom to guide them, wisdom which only comes from God. In the final book of *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine once more unites stylistic and rhetorical propriety with social propriety, this time showing how eloquence without wisdom has little social value. By uniting wisdom and eloquence in the person of the Christian orator, and attributing both to God’s grace, Augustine brings stylistic, rhetorical, and social propriety under the auspices of God as Author (and supreme authority) of all that is good and proper in Creation.

Augustine’s “Aesthetical Epistemology”:

The Proportional Logic Underwriting Augustine’s Early Aesthetics and Later Rhetoric

Upon walking away from his post as teacher of rhetoric, then, Augustine devoted himself in much of his writing, and especially in *On Christian Doctrine*, to salvaging the healthy parts of pagan rhetoric so that it could be used to Christian ends. The basic thesis that Augustine had

38 Augustine cites Cicero directly, who in turn shares in *On Invention* a position popular in Greek rhetoric from the time of Isocrates and Aristotle, “that wisdom without eloquence does too little for the good of states, but that eloquence without wisdom is generally highly disadvantageous and is never helpful” (qtd. in Watson’s *Cicero on Oratory and Orators* xvi).
explored in his early writings, in *On the Beautiful and the Fitting* for example, he later develops in his *Confessions* and *On Christian Doctrine*, and it recurs even in his more mature writings like *City of God*. Before his conversion, when his “mind moved within the confines of corporeal forms . . . [he had] proposed a definition and a distinction between the beautiful as that which is pleasing in itself, and the fitting as that which pleases because it fits well into something else” (*Confessions* 67). He at first supported these definitions with examples he had drawn from the human body and from nature, where he discovered in symmetry and unity the basic grounds of his aesthetic theory.

Symmetry and unity, Augustine thought, constituted beauty, for he found that material members and parts which fit together were pleasing to the observer’s sense of proportion. In his later writings, Augustine develops his aesthetic theory into an theory of ethics in which the “beautiful,” “as that which is pleasing in itself,” comes to represent the spiritual “end,” and the “fitting,” “as that which pleases because it fits well into something else,” comes to represent the material “means” to that spiritual end. And these aesthetic and ethical distinctions later come to represent his basic view of morality: “since in virtue I loved peace and in vice I hated discord, I noted that in virtue there is unity, in vice a kind of division. In the unity I thought I saw the rational mind and the nature of truth and of the highest good; whereas in division there was some substance of irrational life and the nature of supreme evil” (67). Augustine’s aesthetics and ethics, which later come to inform his burgeoning moral doctrine, are shaped in turn by his philosophical and rhetorical training.

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39 Augustine’s sense of proportion—the fitting “as that which pleases because it fits well into something else”—connects his aesthetics, ethics, and later moral theories, all of which shape and are shaped by his “rhetoric” of propriety as “that which is fitting and appropriate to its biblical, historical, and ecumenical context.”
If he acknowledges in his *Confessions* that he found much of what he had read in Neo-
Platonist writing also in the writings of the apostles, especially in the gospel of John and the 
epistles of Paul, Augustine makes it his chief task in *On Christian Doctrine* to rescue pagan 
rhetoric from the ancient stigma that wicked speakers often use it as a means to obtain selfish 
ends—indeed one of the fears of the pagan rhetoricians themselves. Just as due proportion and 
formal propriety had moved Augustine to develop his aesthetic theory around the “fittingness” of 
the parts within the unity of whole; even so does he tie his ethical and moral theories to the same 
principle. Augustine found virtue in unity and vice in division, analogical relations to which
Paul had already given spiritual expression in his *analogia fidei* or the analogy of faith. By locating his exegetical method in Paul’s analogy of faith, Augustine trades upon proportions: The degree of faith readers, teachers, and preachers of Scripture have in God’s Word as the light and the truth is the same degree to which they understand Scripture and open it to others’ understanding.

By this analogy, Augustine ensures that the most eloquent teachers of the Scriptures, even when treating the most difficult passages, can be checked against the teachings of the Scriptures in their entirety. For if any passage conflicts the teachings of the whole, that passage must be read figuratively, as Ambrose had done when Augustine listened to him preach.43

Augustine assumes decorum or propriety in his very definition of the arts of music, grammar, and rhetoric. Like Voiku, who argues that individual notes that produce musical harmonies cannot be easily separated from them, McKenna argues in *The Rhetoric of Propriety* that stylistic and rhetorical propriety cannot be easily separated from the textual or social situations in which they appear. The suggestion is that, like harmony, propriety is only noted when it is present or absent; its formal elements and content resist isolation and specification. However, Augustine is interested in examining just this—how it is that Christians can achieve spiritual piety through the fallen language arts of grammar, rhetoric, and logic. If words mediate the Christian’s understanding of the Word of God, then Augustine is interested in the recovery of linguistic propriety—the Adamic language lost when man fell from grace by his disobedience, and the perfect, complete, whole, integral, unmediated relationship with God that Adamic language implies. Augustine realizes that he seeks linguistic propriety in and through fallen language materials—in and through a grammar degraded by linguistic impurities, a rhetoric that aims at self-aggrandizement, a logic corrupted by too much sophistication; yet he also hopeful that, by the grace of God, spiritual piety can be given proper expression. St. Paul’s *analogia fidei* serves as Augustine’s measure of the propriety of this expression, a proportional logic Augustine uses to at once mark believers’ degree of faith by the degree of purity, selflessness, and clarity—in a word, the degree of “godliness”—present in believers’ language practices. For Puritans following the “Augustinian Strain of Piety” the proper proportion of faith can be tested, inasmuch as professions of faith can be evidenced in professed believers’ language practices. In the chapters that follow, I examine the influence of Augustine’s proportional logic upon Puritan rhetoric and poetics as “prop(r)iety,” a term that captures Augustine’s sense of “spiritual piety” as somehow evidenced in “linguistic propriety.”

43 In meeting Ambrose and listening to him preach, Augustine puts his rhetorical training and his peculiar sensitivity to language, of which he writes much in his *Confessions*, to good use. He notes not only Ambrose’s rhetorical skill but also his exegetical skill as a preacher. What begins for Augustine as appreciation for a fellow artist quickly turns to humility when he discovers that he has ridiculed the sacred writings without reason. The sounds of Ambrose’s words Augustine cannot easily separate from their sense. While listening intently to the form of Ambrose’s preaching, Augustine cannot help but also let in its
Augustine explains this exegetical method by yet another analogy, in which Christians’ reading of the Scriptures are likened to the crucifixion of Christ—“wherein the dissonant passages of Scripture, like the wounds on the body of Christ, required the soothing salve of Christian interpretation to be healed, that is, to be made to mean” (Pucci 126). Augustine thus anticipates in his early aesthetic writings, among them *On the Beautiful and the Fitting* (*De pulchra et apto*), *De magistro*, and *De musica*, his development of an “aesthetical epistemology” that takes shape in his language theory. Like music, language has a semantic or spiritual quality that can be enjoyed for its own sake. Its “harmonies” are complete sensory experiences—the ear or mind’s perception of wholeness created from the fragmentary notes as “pleasing in itself.” Like music, language also carries a ratiocinative quality—in its grammar and syntax—that creates beauty because, by these logics, the hearer marks how the parts (notes, words) aptly “fit” into the whole and collectively compose the very harmony enjoyed as “pleasing in itself.” Though Augustine recognizes the enormous difficulty of theorizing both music and language to parse their content. Ambrose opens Augustine to the Scriptural message even as he opens Scripture itself. Augustine cites the passage from 2 Corinthians to demonstrate the significance of Ambrose’s preaching art, this time emphasizing his exegetical rather than his rhetorical skill:

> I was being turned around . . . I was also pleased that when the old writings of the Law and the Prophets came before me, they were no longer read with an eye to which they had previously looked absurd, when I used to attack your saints as if they thought what in fact they did not think at all. And I was delighted to hear Ambrose in his sermons to the people saying, as if he were most carefully enunciating a principle of exegesis: “The letter kills, the spirit gives life” (2 Cor. 3:6). Those texts which, taken literally, seemed to contain perverse teaching he would expound spiritually, removing the mystical veil. (94)

The central place Augustine gives St. Paul in his *Confessions* he also affords him in *On Christian Doctrine*, where he foregrounds the same passage “The letter kills, the spirit gives life” as his own principle of exegesis. Augustine’s primary aim in *On Christian Doctrine* is to set down an exegetical method for reading the Scriptures according to the *analogia fidei* or “analogy of faith.” The analogy of faith is found in Paul’s injunction in Romans 12:6 that each man ought to exercise his gift of prophecy, or teaching, “according to the proportion of faith.” In “proportion” read that the prophet’s teachings must neither originate in the prophet’s own impulses nor serve as warrant for him to aspire to his own individual ends, but rather correspond to the truth revealed to him as a true believer in the Scriptures.
ratiocinative qualities—their “grammar” or “syntax”—he is motivated to do so by his rhetorical training (and natural gifts and sensitivity to language) to posit a rhetoric of propriety: a distinctly Christian rhetoric to be employed for the purpose of Scriptural exegesis and preaching, a rhetoric that at once captures the elements of harmonizing Word and word and renders them teachable to aspiring preacher-teachers.44

Carol Harrison takes David W. Tracy’s argument about the centrality of caritas as the “transformative principle” of Christian rhetoric a step further in her essay “Rhetoric of Scripture and Preaching: Classical decadence or Christian aesthetic?” Harrison notes Augustine’s sensitivity to the cultural significance of classical rhetoric in his own work and practice. Augustine was uniquely aware of the cultural tensions associated with “Christian oratory,” and Harrison points out that he responded to critiques of classical rhetoric on two fronts: “First to demonstrate that Christian literature and preaching is rhetorical, against pagan criticisms that focused on its lack of literary sophistication. Second, to defend [classical rhetoric’s] use against what he says seems most cogent, ingenuous, and true to his own experience” (221-22). With this second of these arguments, Augustine aimed to recover rhetoric from the Christian charge that those trained in schools of rhetoric, whose pedagogy historians have called the Second Sophistic, learned a kind of rhetoric that smacks of classical decadence. Whatever the speech’s substance, the sophistic rhetorician seeks abundant discourse by amplification, embellishment, and adornment. That is not to say that Christian literature and preaching is not pretty, only that its style must be properly considered so that it is made to fit the truth matter of the discourse and communicate that truth clearly and appropriately to the audience of the discourse: “It is in this sense,” Harrison concludes, “that we can speak of a Christian aesthetic, a new Christian literary culture; one in which rhetoric holds as central a place as it did in classical culture, but where it is transformed from a practice that primarily aims to please and persuade, to one which aims to inspire love of, and the practice of, the truth” (222). Like Tracy, Harrison locates Christian love at the center of Augustine’s exegetical and preaching method:

There is a sort of hermeneutical circle here: love is the hermeneutical principle of Scripture; delight is that which inspires love; beauty is that which inspires delight; truth is that which inspires beauty; what man loves is the truth. It is, therefore, essential for Augustine that Scripture be shown to be beautiful, be made delightful, if its true end is to be attained. This is not a concession to its refined, cultured critics, or to his own sensibilities, but is, rather, the keystone of a “Christian aesthetic” which recognizes that God has chosen to motivate the fallen will to the true and good through the delight occasioned by His beautiful revelation of Himself, and this includes, centrally, Scripture and preaching. (225)

What Harrison has in mind when she writes of Augustine’s “Christian aesthetic” is what Voiku calls Augustine’s “aesthetical epistemology,” and indeed, Harrison’s examination of the “hermeneutical circle” of Scripture as moving the reader from truth to beauty to delight certainly suggests that it is the spiritual episteme or love of truth that moves the reader of Scripture to experience aesthetic delight. It is the work of the preacher, then, to open Scriptural truths, which are of course spiritual truths, to readers that they might experience aesthetic delight. Augustine’s consideration of the “proper method” by which the preacher opens Scripture (in exegesis) and presents its spiritual truths (in preaching) renders both acts a problem of rhetorical propriety, as well as a problem of the propriety of rhetoric, for given his rhetorical training, Augustine turns to Cicero’s oratorical offices—that rhetoric must teach, delight, and move its hearers—to find a proper, albeit pagan, method for interpreting and presenting the “aesthetical epistemology” he already finds in the Scriptures. For Augustine, then, Scripture must be explicated in “fallen language,” and its obscurities, ambiguities, and darker places demand the reader’s imagination, intuition, and aesthetic sensitivity if its message is to become clear. Scripture thus arouses the reader’s intellectual interest and
Perry Miller argues in *The New England Mind* that Augustine’s writings on Christian piety had exerted the greatest single influence upon Puritan thought next to the Bible itself, but Miller largely focuses on Augustine’s *Confessions* to trace Augustine’s influence on Puritans’ understanding of Christian piety. Augustine’s sense of Christian piety began developing prior to his conversion, however, for traces of pagan aesthetic and rhetorical principles can be found in his more mature writings. Augustine’s began developing his aesthetic sense as early *On the Beautiful and the Fitting*, where he articulated how aesthetic pleasure also carries an implicit moral sense. Augustine’s Neo-Platonic ideal that virtue can be found in symmetry and unity and vice in irrationality and division comes to shape his understanding of symmetry and unity as, at once, expressions of a supremely rational mind and expressions of the highest good; in short, symmetry and unity become aesthetic expressions of the mind of God. Augustine references *On the Beautiful and the Fitting* in his *Confessions* to reveal to readers how his early pagan ideals had contributed to his conversion experience.

Augustine converted to Christianity and was shortly after baptized in the faith in 387. Augustine wrote *Confessions* between 397 and 398, after publishing the first three books of *On Christian Doctrine* in 397. He appended Book IV of *On Christian Doctrine* to the first three books many years after in 426. Augustine spent the time in between his publication of *Confessions* and Book IV of *On Christian Doctrine* consolidating and clarifying his understanding of Christian theology, only later returning to *On Christian Doctrine* to explicate for Christian preachers methods for presenting exegetical content—having already published his advice to preachers on interpreting the Scriptures in Books I-III. Book IV thus marks Augustine’s

 appeals to his aesthetic delight. Augustine acknowledges in *On Christian Doctrine* that the preacher-teacher ought to do the same. (My examination of the “preacher-poets” John Milton and Edward Taylor in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively, evidence two different realizations of Harrison’s “hermeneutical circle.” Both writers achieve the “Christian aesthetic” by different uses of the Scriptures’ own typological rhetoric.)
return to his early training in the Roman trivium of grammar, rhetoric, and logic to discuss the importance of these language arts—especially rhetoric—not merely for the invention of exegetical content (in Books I-III), but also for its arrangement and presentation (in Book IV). Even if Augustine had written Book IV alongside Books I-III, his hesitation to publish Book IV alongside Books I-III is sufficient evidence that he needed more than a quarter of a century to weigh the importance of classical rhetoric in the conversion process and bolstering others’ faith in the Scriptures. In the Confessions, Augustine returns to his early study of pagan philosophy, specifically pagan aesthetic principles, to treat the role these aesthetic principles played in his burgeoning sense of Christian morality. In both the Confessions and On Christian Doctrine, Augustine returns to his early training in the language arts to treat the crucial role rhetoric played in his conversion to Christianity and the continued role the Ciceronian ideal of the “perfect orator” might play in the development of a distinctly Christian rhetoric as it takes shape in the person of the Christian orator.

Puritans received Augustine’s Neo-Platonist ideals with little hesitation, for, like Augustine, they found striking similarities between Neo-Platonist thought and Pauline doctrine. Puritans received Augustine’s Ciceronian ideal of the Christian orator with more hesitation, however, for they found that Ciceronian rhetoric focused too much on the style or presentation of a speech’s content. Puritans’ hesitation largely stemmed from the Pauline injunction to preachers to use plain style to deliver to their hearers the Scriptures’ message as unmediated as possible. Puritans thus concluded that preachers’ use of Ciceronian rhetoric risked getting in the way of opening to hearers the rhetoric of the Scriptures as direct expressions of the mind of God. Puritans turned instead to measure their reception of Augustine’s exegetical principles with the leaven of Ramist dialectic. Chapter 2 treats the critical debate between Perry Miller and Sacvan Bercovitch over substance of Christian rhetoric. Both literary historians argue that Puritans
utilized the rhetoric of typology to explicate the Scriptures and the Scriptures’ relevance for their
daily lives. Coupled with vestiges of classical rhetoric, which Puritans still found useful in their
presentation of exegetical content, even if they avoided references to classical rhetoric in their
treatments of the preaching arts, Puritans preachers also turned to Ramist dialectic to treat
methods of invention and arrangement. That invention and arrangement had once served as the
first two canons of classical, Ciceronian rhetoric suggests that Puritans rid Christian rhetoric not
of classical rhetorical principles, but of nominal references to classical rhetorical principles.

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Chapter 2

Puritan Piety as Rhetorical Propriety:

The Dialectics of Wisdom and Eloquence in Puritan Rhetoric

Commentators have debated Puritan rhetoric and poetics since Puritan literature’s inception into the English and American literary canons. These debates have ranged from the quality of Puritan literature to its relative importance within canon. Some commentators have even questioned whether Puritan writings ought to be considered “literature” at all. With the publication of Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* in 1946, however, two striking changes happened in the study of Puritan literature: First, Auerbach’s *Mimesis* changed commentators’ understanding of the Scriptures as a source of aesthetic value, which had the concomitant effect of changing commentators’ approaches to the study of Puritan literature. Second, if as Robert Alter argues in his Introduction to *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, Auerbach’s thesis did much to convince literary historians that “the realisms invented by writers of the Bible were at least as important to the European future [and British and American literary traditions, by extension] as was the literature of ancient Greece” (4), then the rhetoric and poetics studied more specifically in the dominant British and American literary traditions could conceivably have interesting applications to British and American Puritan literature, a literature based squarely in the Holy Scriptures.

Auerbach’s *Mimesis* brought together the Hebraic or “sacred” literary tradition, which, Alter points out, literary historians and literary critics “paradoxically . . . neglected even as they . . . venerated and studied [it]” (4), and the Hellenic or “secular” literary tradition that became the
source of the Western literary canon. Puritans did not entirely reject classical rhetorical and poetical principles in their writing; rather, they approached Greco-Roman cultural materials as carrying the seeds of Christianity. After all, writers of the New Testament, especially Paul, utilized Greco-Roman language materials to convert the Gentiles to Christianity. The Bible thus offers, as Auerbach contends in *Mimesis*, a “mixed” rhetoric—not merely the “antithetical fusion” of what had been characterized in classical rhetoric as “plain” and “grand” styles, but also a “merging” of writing genres otherwise kept separate in the literature of antiquity (45). At the heart of the debate among commentators on Puritan literature is Puritans’ use of the Bible as the basis of their rhetoric and poetics. The Scriptures offer an interesting mixture of language materials and writing genres kept separate in Greco-Roman literature. The Bible also offers Puritans sufficient warrant for conflating cultural and language materials otherwise deemed antithetical to the purpose of sacred literature or the purpose of writing about sacred literature. At the heart of the debate among commentators on Puritan literature, then, is “a rhetoric of propriety”—the *propriety* of Puritans’ “antithetical fusion” of writing styles otherwise kept separate in the literature of antiquity and “merging” of cultural materials to offer intricate representations of common life and spiritual experiences.

Written in the same decade as Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis*, Perry Miller’s *The New England Mind* was similar in its breadth and richness of presentation. Seemingly writing from Auerbach’s conflation of Hebraic and Hellenic literary traditions, Miller examines the Puritan mind from the perspective that Puritans were indeed influenced by sources outside that of the Bible—that, in fact, they embraced often antithetical sources for relating their life and spiritual experiences in their writing. Puritan rhetoric and poetics achieves an interesting mixture of, first, typological readings of the Scriptures, which were modeled on Christ’s own exegetical and preaching methods and which the Puritans extended to their real, lived experiences as ancestors
of the Israelites in the one, true faith; second, Socratic philosophy, which they received from various sources, not the least of which were the writings of John and Paul, the Neo-Platonist ideals of which were further confirmed in Augustine’s *Confessions*; third, classical, Ciceronian rhetorical principles, about which they remained silent—at least nominally—in their treatises on teaching, preaching, and writing about the Word of God; and finally, Ramist philosophy, which allowed them to return to an idealist method of dialectical, invention and arrangement, with none of the stain of sophistry found in the writings of Aristotle and Cicero. Miller’s examination of the extra-biblical influences on Puritan life and writing in *The New England Mind* opened Puritan thought and literature to reevaluations in literary history and criticism. It also sparked debates about the propriety of Miller’s peculiar approach to historiography, likewise opening up a scholarly tradition that can trace its beginnings to Miller’s seminal scholarship on the Puritans.

“The Augustinian Strain of [Puritan] Piety”:

Miller’s Account of Puritans’ Reason-Faith Dialectic

Miller gives the clearest expression to his particular brand of historiography in *The New England Mind*. He notes in its opening chapter, which he titled “The Augustinian Strain of Piety,” that Augustine “exerted the greatest single influence upon Puritan thought next to that of the Bible itself, and in reality a greater one than did John Calvin” (4). At issue for Miller, as well as for many of the commentators writing in his wake, was the degree to which Puritan piety could be traced to certain sources standing outside the Bible. Miller argues in *The New England Mind* that Puritan piety is peculiar in its attempt “to externalize and systematize [the] subjective mood” of
individual believers (5). Augustine’s *Confessions* models the Christian convert’s desire to externalize the tensions between spirit and flesh and offers articulations of a developing theological system predicated upon the redemptive work of Christ. Miller is right to offer Augustine as a model for Puritan piety, but he overemphasizes the degree to which Puritan theology was shaped by extra-biblical influences.

Against a century or more of criticism, Miller offered a more palatable picture of Puritanism, one in which Puritans were not depicted as an irrational, intolerant, and superstitious lot whose Reformation ideology prevented Renaissance ideals from entering American letters until the mid-nineteenth century. Miller offers instead a more holistic picture of the Puritan mind, emphasizing—perhaps to a fault—that “religion was not the sole . . . interest of the Puritans” (6). Miller characterizes the Puritan mind as “peculiar” largely because, like Augustine, Puritans reached a strange synthesis of otherwise contrary ideas, and by the sheer force of their conflation of letter and spirit, thought and belief, reason and faith, they were able to bring different domains of knowledge together toward a single end. Augustine effectively baptized pagan philosophical and rhetorical principles for Christian ends; in fact, he admits that he found already articulated in pagan philosophy a certain Gnosticism also suggested in the Scriptures:

Through a man puffed up with monstrous pride [i.e. Manlius Theodorus, a Neo-Platonist who patronized Augustine at the time of his conversion to Christianity], you [God] brought under my eye some books of the Platonists, translated from Greek into Latin. There I read, not of course in these words, but with entirely the same sense and supported by numerous and varied reasons, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” (121)
Augustine’s early Manichaeism must have colored his interpretation of Greek speculative philosophy, and in the “numerous and varied reasons” to which Augustine appeals in this passage to support the Christian-Gnostic sense he finds suggested in the writings of the Platonists, one certainly sees Augustine’s dialectical synthesis of incongruous cultural materials. Augustine credits his conversion, at least in part, to the Gnostic leanings of Neo-Platonism, which served as philosophical bridge between Augustine’s Manichaeism and Christianity. It is also no surprise that the apostles who, Augustine claimed, had the strongest influence on him worked out their understanding of salvation using ideas also found in Greek speculative philosophy, for these apostles wrote in Greek for Greeks, using cultural materials the Gentiles would know well and to which they would certainly respond. In the *Confessions*, Augustine cites both Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, and John, who wrote the most Gnostic of the gospels, as instrumental to his conversion to Christianity.

Miller turns to Augustine’s dialectical synthesis of disparate cultural materials as the model for Puritans’ notion of piety, for in *The New England Mind*, Miller is less interested in evidencing the Biblicism that without a doubt influenced all facets of Puritan life than in analyzing the Puritans’ curious blending of Biblicism and worldly experience. Miller contends that the Puritans believed “[t]he facts were in the Bible, which was of course the Word of God, but they were also in experience, and a man did not need the sermons of a godly minister to perceive the terms upon which all men struggle through existence.” All a man need do was look about him: “‘Look,’ says the Puritan preacher, the doctrine is ‘as in nature, reason teacheth and experience evidenceth’; to deny it ‘is to go against the experience of all ages, the common sense of all men’” (7). Miller emphasizes the “Augustinian Strain” of Puritan piety to show that, like Augustine, Puritans drew on “the experience of all ages” to understand their fallen condition and
work out their salvation despite their condition. Theirs was a recovery project to return to the state of grace from which Adam, the progenitor of all of humanity, had fallen.

What Augustine offers at crucial moments in his *Confessions* is a dialectical response to the paradoxes of living at once in the world of the body and of the spirit. Augustine’s drawing on dialectical method to explain the soul’s relation to the natural world positions him squarely in the Socratic and pre-Socratic Greek tradition. A pre-Socratic notion of dialectic differs strikingly from the Socratic in method, but differs little in its intent, for both the pre-Socratics and Socratics developed dialectical method to account for change and the simultaneous being and becoming that is man’s paradoxical experience of living in the world. In his book *Dialectic and Difference*, Alan Norie treats Heraclitus’ often-quoted, but largely misunderstood passage dealing with the dialectical flux of living experience, also noting that like much of pre-Socratic

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45 I reference “dialectical method” in several places in this chapter, though the references have slightly different meanings. The pre-Socratic philosophers understood dialectic to mean examining not just aspects of things, but relationships that occur between things; the most common relationship the pre-Socratics examined, as Hericlitus’s famous river metaphor exemplifies, is between aspects of things as parts belonging to a larger whole. The relative freedom of pre-Socratics’ associative logics came to be characterized by the Socratic philosophers as “sophistical,” as mere rhetoric with very little truth value. The Socratic philosophers, on the other hand, understood dialectic as an epistemological method of interrogating an uncertain world from known axioms, the axiom functioning as a certain proposition upon which others might be predicated. Augustine’s rhetorical (or Ciceronian) bent inclined him more toward the pre-Socratic philosophers’ “sophistical” or “aesthetic” understanding of dialectic, which can be clearly seen in his early treatise on aesthetics, titled *On the Beautiful and the Fitting*, and even in his later writings on Christian ethics, such as the *Confessions, On Christian Doctrine*, and *City of God*. Augustine’s later writings achieve an interesting mixture of sophistic aesthetics from Ciceronian rhetorical tradition and Neo-Platonic idealism from Socratic philosophical tradition. The “faith-reason” dialectic that Perry Miller observes in Puritan discourse is thus already present in Augustine’s discourse on Christian ethics. Miller argues that the Puritans took Augustine’s expression of Christian piety, especially as he dramatized it in the *Confessions*, as a model for their own expression of piety. In their preference for plain style, whereby they called attention to the substance, not the style of their practice of piety, Puritans sought an “aesthetical epistemology” like Augustine’s, yet without the highly stylized discourse that Augustine had internalized from his training in Ciceronian rhetoric. Puritans therefore looked to the dialectical method of Petrus Ramus, who parsed dialectic and rhetoric and rendered stylistic concerns the province of rhetoric. Puritans could better realize their preference for plain style using Ramist dialectic, which afforded them a method to invent and arrange their discourse without becoming overly concerned with its style. Instead, Puritans concerned themselves with style as an epistemological rather than an aesthetic concern. Ramist dialectical method looks back to Socratic dialectical method, but differs from it in two important respects: first, Ramist method draws on commonplaces that span dialectical and rhetorical invention; second, Ramist method divides and arranges discourse largely by a binary logic. I treat Ramist method at greater length below.
philosophy, the passage survives not just in a fragmentary form, but also highly refracted through a Platonic polemical lens. Norie writes,

Let us begin with the famous vexed question of stepping into the same river twice. Here is how Plato recounts Hericlitus’s view [which is only a partial account of his argument]:

Heraclitus says somewhere that ‘everything gives way and nothing stands fast,’ and, likening the things that are flowing of a river, he says that ‘you cannot step into the same river twice’. (Plato [Cratylus] 1997d: 402a)

This, however, is what the two fragments most clearly attributable to Heraclitus actually say:

In the same rivers ever different waters flow . . .

We step and do not step into the same rivers . . . . (Barnes 1987: 70)

The first fragment reflects a realist understanding of how entities are composed of elements that make the whole different from the parts. The concept of a river requires a holistic or structured understanding of how the flow of water must be grasped at two different levels: as, first, a constant flow of water molecules in, second, the naturally structured whole that is the river. The paradox in the statement (same . . . different . . .) reflects such an understanding, and its consequence is that, once you understand what a river is, you can properly be said to step into it twice. It would involve a reductionist understanding of a river to deny this, and this is precisely illustrated by the second fragment. Regarding
the river as ever-flowing water, you cannot, it is true, step into the same one twice (or once?), but regarding it as a holistically constituted, structured river, you can. Hence, we step and do not step into the same river, depending on how we understand what a river is. (206-207)

Plato’s reductionist account of Heraclitus’ river metaphor reveals only one side of the dialectical paradox that Heraclitus would represent with this metaphor; in fact, Plato quotes Heraclitus in part to illustrate the point that, in being bound by time, the material world is in a state of flux. As Norie points out, however, Heraclitus’ river metaphor not only accounts for the progression of time and the material changes it effects, but also for the whole or essence that sits at the margins of this perception of the world and, indeed, contains it much like the river banks contain and channel the flow of water.

Augustine’s earliest writings also reveal a concern with the dialectical order of things—how the world can be perceived at once partially and holistically. The dialectical “trick,” which comes to inform Augustine’s notion of piety, is seeing the whole always-already existing in relations among the parts. After his conversion, Augustine refers to the holistic perception of worldly experience as “right reasoning”—a form of “godly seeing” whereby the Christian perceives God in every moment and relation of his worldly existence. Augustine termed such perception caritas: man’s exercise of Christ’s redemptive grace and superabundant love. Though momentary, these entirely subjective feelings of wholeness or integrity about which he writes in his Confessions later moved Augustine to posit a complete state of grace as moral and intellectual perfection in and through Christ, but the suggestion is already present in his early writings on aesthetics, such as On the Beautiful and the Fitting and De musica. In the former, Augustine develops a very basic thesis: “the beautiful [is] that which is pleasing in itself, and the fitting [is]
that which pleases because it fits well into something else” (Confessions 67). Symmetry and unity represent Augustine’s conception of beauty, for he writes that he discovered a kind of virtue in symmetry and unity that evidenced the operations of a “rational mind,” a mind in which he at once found “the nature of truth and of the highest good” (67). In asymmetry and division, on the other hand, he discovered a kind of vice he considered at once “the substance of irrational life and the nature of supreme evil” (67). Augustine thus perceives the mind of God at work in symmetry and unity and in division and alienation the lived experience of a degenerate world.

In his more mature writings, Augustine develops his aesthetic theory into a Christian ethics based on his theory of proper proportions. For Augustine, proportion is beautiful because it is rational and, as such, good and true. His definition of the beautiful as “that which is pleasing in itself” concerns wholes whose parts “please because [they] fit well” into the whole. The parts please when they are properly unified in the whole of which they are parts. To be “properly unified” means that the parts are symmetrically, proportionally, or otherwise rationally arranged, and Augustine locates aesthetic response at the moment when the logic of the parts’ arrangement becomes clear and comprehensible to the perceiver. In his early aesthetic theory, Augustine accounts for both the universal and the particular, or rather where the universal meets the particular and the particular “fits” into the universal. Informing his aesthetic sense, then, is propriety, parts which “please because [they] fit well into something else.” Why these parts please can be clearly traced to their “fittingness” in the whole or “appropriateness” in relation to other parts. Why they might be considered “fitting” or “appropriate” is another matter. What makes them fit depends upon the logic of the whole, for the parts cohere by this logic. Whether the parts are discursive (i.e. grammatical, rhetorical) or social (i.e. ethical, political), the logic which unifies and renders them cohesive and coherent pleases when the perceiver recognizes its
principle of cohesion and coherence. The ancients called the discovery of such principles or logics "arts." Augustine understood artistic knowledge as a reflection of the mind of God.

Augustine’s dialectical method and Platonic bent of mind surfaces quite clearly in his Confessions, where he explains humanity’s process of recovering its once-pious relation to God, from which it fell, as a kind of “remembering” how to reason rightly or properly. Augustine has a far more complex understanding of memoria than what we use the term “memory” to designate. His notion of memory associates three cognitive actions for which we have developed separate terms: the unconscious, which Augustine posits when he writes, “the mind knows things it does not know it knows;” self-awareness, which, following the Delphic oracle, Augustine argues is the aim of the individual soul; and desire, which Augustine understands as the human longing for true happiness found only in complete faith and knowledge of God. He writes of memoria and its role in removing the scales from men’s eyes that they might reason about the world with a sense of “prop(ri)ety” and ultimately, by their practice of a “rational faith,” look upon the face of God and live:

I will therefore rise above the natural capacity in a step by step ascent to him who made me. I come to the fields and vast palaces of memory, where are the treasuries of innumerable images of all kinds of objects brought in by sense-perception. Hidden there is whatever we think about, a process which may increase or diminish or in some way alter the deliverance of the senses and whatever else has been deposited and placed on reserve and has not been swallowed up and buried in oblivion. (185)

Henry Chadwick notes on his translation of this passage in Augustine’s Confessions that the passage is saturated in the Platonic doctrine of anamnesis, which explains “the experience of
learning as bringing to consciousness what, from an earlier existence, the soul already knows” (185). Augustine looks back to the prelapsarian mind and discourse of Adam as the clearest human reflection of the mind and Word of God. He clearly states in this passage that locked and hidden away in depths of human memory is the strong desire to recover the Adamic language and a less mediated relationship to God, but Augustine only suggests in other passages in his *Confessions* and other post-conversionary writings that the language he has in mind is a conflation of the language arts of dialectic and rhetoric—a “dialectical rhetoric.”

In his dialectical rhetoric, Augustine offers a view of rational proportions that please only because Augustine discovers in these proportions’ dynamic relations among parts (and between the parts and the wholes of which they are parts) a universal logic that expresses the mind of God. To discover the logic inherent in a system of relations is to know as God knows, and Christian writers following Augustine, especially the Puritans, elevated this reasoning capacity in man—used rightly—to an expression of man’s faith. Considering this logic as an *expression* of God’s mind meant hearing an utterance of the divine voice or looking upon an aspect of the divine face; discovering or remembering this logic meant having some intonation or outward sign of God’s mind. Language and rhetoric met both needs for Augustine. Augustine’s interest in expression (in speech, gesture, or writing) is everywhere apparent in his writings on rhetoric and signification.

Even in his writings on other arts, like music, he finds analogues in rhetoric and signification and

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46 Milton develops Augustine’s sense of “rational faith” in his concept of *ratio recta*, which he treats at various places in his prose tracts and poetry. In *Of Education*, for instance, Milton argues that it is the goal of reformed education to “repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love Him, to be like Him, as we may be nearest by possessing our soul of true virtue” (631). Milton emphasizes the alignment of faith and reason in the “true virtue” of “know[ing] God aright.” In *Paradise Lost* Book V, Milton recalls Augustine’s “step by step ascent to him who made me” during Raphael’s discourse with Adam in the garden. Raphael instructs Adam by informing him that the “time may come when men / With Angels may participate” (lines 493–94). Milton again aligns faith and reason in Raphael’s discourse, showing that the soul’s *being* is reason and its *becoming* is obedience to God. I discuss Milton’s concept of “right reason” at greater length in Chapter 5, Part 2, “Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and the Failure of Kairotic Propriety.”
actually explains his understanding of these other arts as if they were “languages” possessing their own “syntactic” and “semantic” poles. For Augustine, the art of music reaches its aesthetic effects in melodies and harmonies (here read “unities”) by the rhythmical succession of single sounds whose composition the listener appreciates as aesthetic wholes. Like language, music “means” when its parts make wholes, when its syntactic pole meets its semantic pole. In *A Primer on the Language Theory of St. Augustine*, Daniel J. Voiku examines Augustine’s “aesthetical epistemology”—his understanding of syntax and prosody as he articulates it in *De musica*. If in *De magistro* Augustine offers his complete theory of semantics, claims Voiku, then *De musica* is Augustine’s full treatment of syntax and prosody, both of which he discusses alongside his description of rhythm and meter as an element common to language and music.

Voiku’s pairing of language and music to explain Augustine’s aesthetical epistemology not only calls to mind Augustine’s rhetorical approach to proper exegetical and preaching practice in *On Christian Doctrine*, but also his suggestion in several of his post-conversionary writings that “rational faith” is exercised in the practice of dialectical method; that, indeed, dialectical method may serve as the key to unlocking the storehouse of the mind in order that man may recover something of his former glory by the “deliverance” of his senses and thereby “rise above [his] natural capacity in a step by step ascent to [the One] who made [him].” Norie, again citing a passage from Heraclitus’ view of dialectic, explains that dialectic was the process the Greeks used to reach harmonies from surface or apparent discord:

> We can pursue the matter a little further [writes Norie]. The importance of structure is also seen in a second fragment [of Heraclitus’ philosophy], that concerning the bow and the lyre, where Heraclitus states that the diverging agrees with itself: a structure turning back on itself such as that of the bow and the lyre. (Hussey 1999: 96)
What we have here is the sense of a thing that is constituted not by its passing into something else, its becoming, but by the active tension, the becoming, in the elements in its structured being. A bow of wood and string held together by the tension in its forms, and similarly with the lyre. In this regard . . . a key term for Heraclitus, alongside strife, war and fire, is *harmonie*, which in Greek usage meant ‘a purposive mutual adjustment of components to produce a unity’ (Hussey 1999: 110) through a process. (Norie 207)

Like his river metaphor to illustrate dialectical perception or judgment, Heraclitus here offers the tuning of a lyre as a metaphor for dialectical method—the purposive mutual adjustment of surface tensions among component parts (e.g. strings of the lyre) to sound deeper harmonies.

Augustine also likens the language arts to the musical arts to illustrate the paradoxes of worldly experience: the spiritual harmonies Christians ought to see in apparent or material discord. For Augustine, language is a “medial tool” which must give way to the truth one seeks in and through it. Music functions in much the same way. Music is a sensory experience and can be enjoyed for its own sake; music is also a ratiocinative experience in which the parts, or individual notes, cannot be easily separated from the whole harmony they collectively produce. Reminiscent of Quintilian’s definition of rhetoric as “the good man speaking well” (*vir bonus dicendi peritus*), Augustine defines music in Chapter 2 of *De musica* as the “science of modulating well” (*Musica est scientia bene modulandi*). Although Voiku does not pursue the connection between linguistic and musical propriety beyond noting that Augustine valued “due proportion” in both of these “time arts,” he does point out that music, like language, must be well proportioned if it is to fit its context and reach the end for which it was artfully designed:
In fact, says Augustine, the word “bene” might ideally be omitted from the definition of music, since to understand modulation is to understand good modulation. Anything that maintains modulation, the harmonious “measuring of times and intervals[,] can already be said to move well” (1.3.3). The qualitative word is, in fact, necessary only to insure decorum. That is to say, if a person were to dance and sign gaily when an occasion demanded gravity, such a person would not be modulating well. In this sense, to modulate well is to modulate proprietously. Decorum aside, therefore, it is quite correct to say that “modulation” and “good modulation” are synonymous terms. (83-84)

Augustine assumes decorum or propriety in his very definition of the arts of music, grammar, rhetoric (and their respective logics). When or where the “syntactic” and “semantic” poles meet Augustine locates harmony, which he finds both pleasing and virtuous if they can be said to meet in proper measure or proportion. How they meet is what he is particularly interested in, and whether he analyzes language or music, Augustine treats unity as a virtue that is pleasing in itself. That he treats unity as pleasing places us within the field of aesthetics; that he treats unity as virtuous places us within the field of ethics; that he treats unity as an expression of the mind of God begs analysis of the language arts of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic through the lens of Augustine’s conversion theology.47

Miller examines Augustine’s conversion theology in The New England Mind, “The Augustinian Strain of Piety,” observing that the Puritans had read Augustine’s Confessions to understand the reason-faith dialectic in Augustine’s practice of piety and describing the Puritans’ practice of piety as the “concrete problem” at the core of their theology—“the relation of the

47 This was precisely the subject of Chapter 1, “Rhetorical Propriety in Augustine’s On Christian Doctrine.”
individual to the One” (8). Miller argues that Augustine’s aesthetical epistemology largely influenced Puritans’ dialectical perception of the world as at once partial and whole. He writes, for instance, that the Puritan had

moments of vision when the living spirit seems to circulate in his veins, when man is in accord with the totality of things, when his life ceases to be a burden to him and separateness is ecstatically overcome by mysterious participation in the whole. In such moments he has intimations of rightness, of a state of being in which he and his environment achieve perfect harmony, just as in his imagination he has fancied that once he did dwell in paradise. When these moments have passed he endeavors to live by their fading light, struggling against imperfection in the memory of their perfection, or else he falls back, wearied and rebellious, into cynicism and acrimony. All about him he sees men without his illumination, exemplifying the horrors of their detached and forlorn condition. (7-8)

Miller shows that Puritans worked to sustain the totalizing vision by which they might transcend their alienation from one another and from the world around them and participate once again in the whole that is God. “The ultimate reason of all things they called God,” writes Miller, “the dream of a possible harmony between man and his environment they named Eden, the actual fact of disharmony they denominated sin, the moment of illumination was divine grace, the effort to live in the strength of that illumination was faith, and the failure to abide by it was reprobation” (8). Miller thus traces the “concrete problem,” which became the heartbeat of Puritan theology, to the desire to discover and keep the ultimate reason of all things, which is to know God and see the world by the lamp of grace. The substance of “The Augustinian Strain of Piety,” concludes Miller, is this: “Deum et animam scire cupio. Nihilne plus? Nihil omnino.” [“I wish to know God
and His Spirit. Nothing more? Nothing less.”] The *practice* of piety implies a method, and Puritans indeed sought a method for comprehending and keeping the ultimate reason of things. They turned to Augustine to articulate their sense of Christian piety; they turned to Ramus to articulate their method of practicing it—a different kind of “dialectical rhetoric” that would balance the raw emotional vicissitudes of worldly experience with the leaven of right reason.

Miller’s picture of the Puritans is both clear and convincing, for he attempted to answer reductionist scholarship that painted Puritan experience as harsh and grotesque because it was limited to a strict Biblicism based in Calvinist principles. Both the scholarship to which Miller responded and Miller’s response can be read as overstatements, though Miller’s account of the Puritan mind contains the kind of richness only approximated by the use of dialectical method. Miller’s intellectual history approaches the real concrete of Puritans’ lived experience in the thought concrete of his historiography, and though he nowhere acknowledges the Marxist bent of his own historical method, the sheer amount of historical data he marshals to offer a realistic depiction of the Puritan mind does indeed suggest the kind of historiography Marx himself theorized in dialectical materialism. And yet, to achieve this degree of realism, Miller bracketed in order that he might look beyond precisely that which characterized the Puritan mind in the reductionist accounts where he found his exigency for *The New England Mind*. The Puritan cast

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48 Labeling Miller’s historiography “dialectical” is neither to claim that Miller was a Marxist nor to suggest that Miller embraced every facet of Marxist dialectical principles. In fact, there is much in Miller’s historiography, especially in *The New England Mind* (which several commentators have called the “epitome” of Miller’s method), that would suggest that Miller’s abstractions are the kind of thin abstraction Marx critiqued in Hegel’s idealism, Fichte’s dialectical method, and Feuerbach’s materialism. Many commentators charge Miller with focusing too much on the “inner” life of abstract ideas without giving due consideration to the social and economic conditions from which they arose. That Marx himself argued for social and economic conditions as the “final analysis” of all good historiography renders Miller’s account of the Puritan intellectual tradition neither Marxist nor adequately “material” in the Marxist sense. This critique of Miller’s approach to intellectual history has been leveled by several commentators, among them Robert Skotheim, who argues that “Miller [is] interest[ed] in thought for its sake” (191) and that his first book, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts* “was written without regard for the social and economic conditions which might have affected Puritan thought” (197). Skotheim cites Miller’s claim that he intended
of mind is entirely Calvinist, and Miller does much to bracket Calvinism as a partial picture of Puritanism, offering in various seemingly reductive statements of his own, such as the following: “The so-called ‘Five Points’ of Calvinism were simply a scholastical fashion” (8). Doing so affords Miller the opportunity to examine ideas and influences without the Calvinism that so saturated the Puritan mind and worldview; however, he risks overlooking the very Biblicism and Christology indicative of Calvinism, the salvific end toward which Puritans thought in and about the world and lived their lives. Miller’s holistic approach to the Puritanism gets reduced to a partial picture, for, in fact, Calvinism serves as the theological ordering principle that renders cohesive the otherwise incongruent ideas and cultural materials composing the Puritan mind and imagination. By writing against the reductionist accounts that precede his more complete intellectual history of Puritanism, Miller accepts a picture of Calvinism that is perhaps too severe and unsympathetic for a twentieth-century audience. But Calvinism offered both beauty and comfort to the seventeenth-century Puritan.

Orthodoxy in Massachusetts “to tell of a great folk movement with an utter disregard of the economic and social factors,” and offers this declaration as evidence for Miller’s “narrow view of Puritanism” in The New England Mind, which he published shortly after (qtd. in Butts 667). Skotheim also contends that Miller’s The New England Mind “was an exceedingly detailed study of the content and structure of ideas, with almost no attention given to the environment from which these ideas came” and thus ignores, or even disparages, “social and economic background information as being relevant in any way to a fuller understanding of Puritan thought” (196). Other commentators have leveled similar critiques of Miller’s “abstracted intellectualism.” Robert Darnton argues in his essay “Intellectual and Cultural History,” for instance, that Miller “raised the level of intellectual history by stripping it of any concern for social context” and his enormous influence has encouraged Americanists “to chase after abstractions—myths, symbols, and images” so that “by the 1960s the American Studies movement had cut American intellectual history free of its moorings in social history and had drifted off in pursuit of a disembodied national mind” (329). Some commentators have even suggested that Miller’s method makes him “something of a Platonist, a scholar who in principle regarded ideas as essences independent of space and time,” as Francis Butts points out in his review of the critical literature surrounding Miller’s historiography. Butts also cites Robert Middlekauff’s assessment of Miller’s thought, in which “form . . . may be thought of as having existence outside of experience; form indeed may be outside of history” (174). In his own review of the critical literature surrounding Miller’s work, Middlekauff points out that Miller “not only ignores experience,” but also “deals with the Puritan mind as if it were static” (182). These critical assessments of Miller’s work certainly leave room for a conceptual approach to Puritan intellectual tradition that at the same time acknowledges the social and economic conditions in which these ideas took shape. As a method, “rhetorical propriety” offers a rhetorical approach to the language materials in which ideas get realized and acknowledges the social and economic conditions (i.e. propriety as both “social decorum” and “property relations”) that shape these ideas.
The Miller-Bercovitch Debate:

Puritans’ Uses of Typology and Allegory as Analogues of Faith

Several critics writing in the wake of Miller’s seminal recovery project note its tremendous influence on intellectual historians’ historiography and literary historians’ understanding of Puritan life through Puritan literature. Miller achieves a breadth and richness of presentation that few historians of Puritanism have been able to follow, and for this reason, Miller has stood for over seventy years as an intellectual “father” many commentators have sought to slay. Some have even used this very metaphor in their critical assessments of Miller’s work. In his review of the critical literature surrounding Miller’s *The New England Mind*, for instance, Arne Delfs revises in his essay “Anxieties of Influence: Perry Miller and Sacvan Bercovitch” what he terms the “complex intellectual relationship between Miller and Bercovitch” (602). Delfs sets out to recast critical estimations of this relationship as somehow strained, treating especially those commentators who have portrayed Bercovitch as Miller’s “antagonist . . . or, worse, as a parricide” (602). Delfs cites David Harlan’s essay, “A People Blinded from Birth: American History According to Sacvan Bercovitch,” as evidence of precisely this cast of mind. Harlan argues that “Bercovitch has come not to honor Miller but to bury him; Bercovitch’s interpretation of Puritanism is not an extension of Miller’s work, but its denial and negation” (952). Harlan’s critique offers a dialectical pairing of Miller and Bercovitch’s work, which his Hegelian language of “negation” certainly suggests. Delfs dismisses Harlan’s essay for this very reason, however, claiming that “Harlan’s polemic can be summarized in one of his overdrawn metaphors: Bercovitch’s work, he declares, is ‘itself a lance hurled straight into the heart of Miller’s corpus’”
The Harlan-Delfs debate offers dialectical perspective on the Miller-Bercovitch debate, which in turn treats the dialectics of the Puritan mind with such clarity and force that it has become something of a commonplace in Puritan intellectual history and literary historians’ understanding of Puritan life and literature.

The Harlan-Delfs debate stems from each commentator’s taking sides in the Miller-Bercovitch debate—Harlan with Miller and Delfs with Bercovitch. Both Harlan and Delfs focus on the “rhetoric” of Bercovitch’s treatment of Miller’s work. Whereas Delfs characterizes Bercovitch’s treatment of Miller’s work as a “creative misreading,” Harlan argues that it is just plain “misreading.” Both Delfs and Harlan concern themselves especially with Miller and Bercovitch’s respective understandings of the uses to which Puritans put typological readings of the Scriptures. Delf traces the origin of the Miller-Bercovitch debate to Bercovitch’s “revisionist critique” of Miller’s “Essay in Interpretation.” In his essay “Typology in Puritan New England: The Williams-Cotton Controversy Reassessed,” Bercovitch reconsidered Miller’s portrayal of John Cotton as “a typologist who assumed a direct historical link between Old Testament prophecies and historical events in the Puritan colony” and Williams as “an allegorist who held to a spiritual interpretation of Scripture, which undermined Cotton’s typological vision of New England” (603). For Miller, then, Cotton and Williams offer irreconcilable methods for interpreting Scripture, which, Bercovitch contends, rests on faulty premises. To prove his point, he cites in “Typology in Puritan New England” Miller’s position on Puritans’ use of typology:

Professor Miller’s position rests [says Bercovitch] on the premise that the early Puritans “eschewed” typology. He contends that Luther and Calvin “had been very explicit in their condemnation of the typological method” and that,
accordingly, “Puritan divines [were] . . . resolved to expunge [it] . . . from Biblical exegesis.” (167-68)

Delfs points out that it was in a fortuitous blunder that Bercovitch discovered in his misquoting of Miller’s position on Puritans’ use of typology exigency for his critique of Miller in “Typology in Puritan New England.” Bercovitch found a lifetime of scholarship in response to Miller’s editorial comment in Jonathan Edwards’ *Images and Shadows of Divine Things* that “in the literature of New England . . . a resurgence of typology can be traced, as it can in the literature of all Protestant communities” and to Miller’s accompanying footnote, in which Miller added, “A study of the revival of typology in Protestant countries during the seventeenth century would . . . make a substantial contribution to an understanding of modern literature” (141; n. 30). Delfs shows that Bercovitch misrepresents Miller’s position and yet extends Miller’s pioneering work on the Puritan mind: “Miller had not argued that all Puritans had ‘eschewed’ typology,” writes Delfs; “rather, he had limited his statement to European Protestant reformers” (604), as in the following passage from *Roger Williams—His Contribution to the American Tradition*:

[T]he great Protestant reformers [said Miller] had been very explicit in their condemnation of the typological method along with every other variant of the allegorical . . . The Reformers were the more resolved to expunge this method from Biblical exegesis because they were convinced that in the late Middle Ages (as we call them) the allegorical and typological interpretations had become a riot of irresponsible divinations. (34-35)

Without a doubt, Delfs contends, Miller would have understood the distinction between the New England Puritans’ and European Reformers’ attitudes toward typology, and “[i]ndeed, only two
pages beyond the passage Bercovitch quotes [as the substance of his critique of Miller], Miller had stated explicitly:

> Puritan theologians—especially those who came to New England—read about the covenant which God had established with Abraham, and so organized their churches on a covenant among the saints which included their “seed.” By this sort of reading, they produced a theology, an ecclesiastical program, and a social philosophy for New England. *They did not entirely condemn typology;* the founders of New England recognized that it, if used with extreme caution, might have its uses. (37)[49]

Bercovitch may have misread Miller’s position on New England Puritans’ typological rhetoric, but in doing so, he clarified or “decoded” what appears to be buried, in Harlan’s words, in “the giant cryptogram of America that Perry Miller gave us” (952).

Bercovitch clarifies Miller’s distinction between two fundamentally different typological readings of Scripture: Cotton’s historical typology and Williams’ allegorical typology. The kind of typology Miller claims the Reformers were resolved to expunge from their method of Biblical exegesis was the allegorizing typology practiced by the Medieval Churchmen, among them Augustine, whose example of piety Miller claims cast such a long shadow over Christian history to influence the seventeenth-century Protestants’ understanding of their relationship to God. This slippage in terms, which Bercovitch notes in Miller’s statements on typology, Mason Lowance also notes in his book *The Language of Canaan*. Lowance argues that Miller does much to properly historicize Puritan aesthetic principles, but adds little to clarify the aesthetic principles

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[49] Delfs’ emphasis.
themselves. In *The New England Mind*, Miller writes of the aesthetic principles of the English Reformer whom, Delfs argues, Miller had adequately separated from the New England Reformer:

The iconoclasm of the New Model Army was not vandalism, it was artistic criticism; neither Cromwell’s soldiers nor the New England ministers could perceive anything beautiful in the sermons of John Donne or the stained glass which they tossed upon the rubbish heaps; both alike kept out the light . . . . The supreme criterion of the style was, inescapably, the doctrine of means; metaphors were more prized than antitheses, similes more admired than assonances, because they were better instruments for convincing the mind and moving the passions. Scripture itself used earthly similitudes, comparisons and parables, “to convey truth to us under sensible things, things that we can feel, because that we are led with senses in this life.” (Williams qtd. in Miller; Miller qtd. in Lowance 1)

Miller associates the New Model Army’s iconoclasm with the New England ministers’ preference for a functional aesthetic to demonstrate the *proper* use of “earthly similitudes.” As Miller argues, the Puritans’ “supreme criterion” of style was “inescapably, the doctrine of means.” The Scriptures themselves employ metaphor and other figures, but only to illuminate spiritual truths. Puritans’ use of figural correspondences must therefore do the same, serving as “means” of conveying or illuminating Scriptural-spiritual truths, even if it is by offering “earthly similitudes.”

Miller suggests in this passage, and Lowance argues about this passage, that Puritans concerned themselves most with the distinction between letter and spirit, a distinction in which the letter at once signifies language (as in syntax) and law-as-prohibition, and the spirit at once signifies sense (as in semantics) and wisdom as fulfillment of the law. The Scriptures themselves offer just this distinction, for the New Testament dispensation fulfills the prohibitions of the Old
Testament law in the love and Scriptural wisdom of Christ, who serves as mediator between God and humanity, between Word and word.\footnote{Paul writes in Romans 10:4, for instance, “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” Where Old Testament law and animal sacrifice ends, the New Testament dispensation and Christ’s human sacrifice begins. This is also true of the Old Testament prohibitions and prescriptions, such as dietary restrictions, which the New Testament dispensation reinterprets in light of Christ’s ministry. Peter’s vision while at prayer upon the housetop of Simon the tanner in Acts 10, for example, directly addresses how dietary restrictions were reinterpreted in the light and wisdom of the gospel:

And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance,

And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending upon him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:

Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.

But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.

And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. (Acts 10:10–15)

This passage deals directly with the Levitical prohibition against eating unclean meats. God’s command that Peter eat unclean meats, which is a transgression Levitical law, Peter at first misinterprets as a contradiction of God’s Word: “Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.” And neither did Christ nor his other apostles eat anything unclean. Only upon reflection does Peter reinterpret God’s command in the spirit of the gospel, whereby he draws the sense and spirit from the letter and law: “Now . . . Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean,” but later discovers its meaning. “Ye know how that it is unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean” (Acts 10:17, 28). Peter reflects upon the Levitical law that dietary restrictions and ritual cleansing set God’s chosen people apart from the common and unclean but for the ministry of Christ, which brought the saving grace of God’s Word to Gentiles as well as Jews.

The same is true of the gospel. Mark 7, for instance, treats the issue of ritual cleansing. Christ and his disciples meet with certain Pharisees and scribes coming from Jerusalem, who note as they come upon Christ and his disciples that they eat with unwashed hands:

And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen hands, they found fault.

For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders.
exegetical methods they already found at work in Scripture itself, in Christ’s and his apostles’ reinterpretations of Old Testament law. The metaphorical pairings that appealed to their senses were simply means for illuminating darkened places in Scripture, that a suitable metaphor or apt turn of phrase might signify the spirit, if not the letter, of the Bible’s more elusive passages. New Testament writers did just this, for, following Christ, they revised Old Testament law and letter by the sense and spirit, by the light and wisdom of Christ’s ministry in the gospels. Puritans needed to look no further than the Bible itself for their exegetical model. It was in Scripture, then,

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Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands?

He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esais prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

... 

There is nothing from without man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man. (Mark 7:2-3, 5-7, 15)

Like the passage from Acts 10, which addresses the distinction between things clean and unclean, between things acceptable and unacceptable to God, Mark 7 addresses ritual washing as an act of purification from uncleanness. Peter’s vision moved him to reflect upon the gospel message, beyond considerations of the suitability or unsuitability of certain animals for sacrifice and sources of food to considerations of the motives and intentions of the heart which can be judged to be clean or unclean; that which sets Gentiles apart from those unclean and sinful is the suitable sacrifice of their heart, their communion with Christ, both of which came to be symbolized in the Eucharistic celebration as, at once, the believer’s suitable spiritual sacrifice, spiritual communion with Christ, and consumption of acceptable spiritual food in the bread and wine (i.e. body and blood of Christ’s sacrifice), which cleanses the believer of his sin. Likewise, Christ’s attitude toward the Pharisees’ disapproval of his disciples’ eating with unclean hands speaks not to the act of ritual washing, which he accepted, but beyond it to Pharisees’ emphasis on outward expression rather than inward assurance of faith. Puritans thus noted that the Scriptures themselves model their own proper exegesis, which accounts for the letter but accepts the spirit of the passage. Puritans read Scripture against Scripture; that is to say, they worked out seeming contradictions between certain passages by noting their place (i.e. Scriptural and historical context) or by comparing them (according to the analogy of faith) with other passages in which the sense of the doctrine is clear, that these other passages might illuminate those whose sense is darkened.
that Puritans found both their sermon rhetoric and the aesthetical principles underwriting their poetics.

What Puritans found in the writings of Augustine was both a historical precursor and further justification for their understanding of Christian piety as it gets taken up in conversations between the Old and New Testaments. Augustine’s writings did much to advance Christian aesthetics, as well as the rhetoric that became its primary medium, and typological readings of Scripture served to extend the rhetoric of the Scriptures to Puritans’ real, lived experience. Taking a page directly from the gospels, which Augustine’s writings on homiletics only served to reinforce, Puritans developed a complex aesthetical and rhetorical tradition predicated on narratives and prophesies they found in the Scriptures. They were indeed a people of a book. As Richard Lischer writes in The Company of Preachers,

Jesus began his public ministry by preaching on a text from Isaiah, which he interpreted as a witness to his own messianic office. He parried a lawyer’s question about eternal life with the counterquestions, “What is written in the law? How do you read?” (Luke 10:26). Since the time of Jesus his followers have been people of a book, and his preachers have honored the Scriptures as the source and norm of their proclamation. (169)

Lischer points out that Christians, as followers of Christ, take Christ as their model reader and interpreter of the Scriptures and as their model rhetorician in his teaching and preaching of the Scriptures. The majesty of Christ’s ministry is in its power to speak to, much like Augustine

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51 The point is especially true of Edward Taylor’s Preparatory Meditations. In his book Sinful Self, Saintly Self, Jeffrey Hammond posits that Edward Taylor imagined a “Christic reader” of his poetry. I argue in Chapter 6, Part 2, “The Propriety of Place in Edward Taylor’s Preparatory Meditations,” that Taylor not only imagined himself writing for Christ as the ideal audience of his poetry, but also imagined himself writing upon Christ as the incarnate Word of God in the Scriptures. The dynamic between Word and word I
says of the Scriptures themselves, the specific state of the individual believer’s soul as well as address itself to the larger Christian audience. Christ’s commencement of his ministry by preaching on a passage from Isaiah, which prophesies his own messianic office, thus offers typological rhetoric as the model Christian rhetoric, whereby Christians might become conscious of their place and purpose in the progression of ecumenical history.

The substance of the Miller-Bercovitch debate concerns which kind of typological rhetoric the Puritans actually practiced. The debate offers a dialectical examination of the role typological rhetoric plays in Puritan life and Puritan preaching, and shows the difficulties of distinguishing clearly between typological and allegorical readings of Scripture. In The Language of Canaan, for example, Mason Lowance turns to Erich Auerbach’s Scenes from the Drama of European Literature to clarify the distinction between typology and allegory. Lowance explains that the Puritans’ preference for typology to allegory had been largely motivated by the fear that allegorical exegesis encourages freer and more subjective associations than typological exegesis, which, claims Lowance, is a tighter and more controlled way of reading the Scriptures. Lowance traces the Puritans’ figural preferences through Augustine to the writings of St. Paul, whose own exegetical approach focused especially on the redemptive work of God in and through history. Just as St. Paul differed from Philo in preferring typology to allegory, so too did Augustine differ from Tertullian in his typological approach to Scripture. Lowance explains the difference thus:

Typology emphasizes the historical and the concrete and is set within a linear scheme of time; allegory is abstract and nonhistorical, and the allegorist places little value on typology’s scheme of prophecy and fulfillment. “Figural
interpretation [typology] established a connection between two events or persons, the first of which signifies not only itself but the second, while the second encompasses or fulfills the first. The two poles of the figure are separate in time, but both being real events or figures, are within time, within the stream of historical life.” (21)

Lowance argues that typology lends itself to Scriptural correspondences linking Old Testament figures and places as “types,” as well as linking historical events as “prophesies” anticipating “antitypes” and “fulfillment” in the New Testament. Puritans took typology a step further, reading their own place in history as “antitypical” to the Israelites’ and, therefore, a close antecedent of the Messiah’s second coming. Puritans’ desire to realize their prophesied place in ecumenical history made them suspicious of any human rhetoric or designs not entirely based in the Word and Designs of God.

What’s the Matter with Words?

Puritans’ Preference for Ramist Dialectic to Augustinian Rhetoric

In order to situate themselves in ecumenical history, Puritans had to revise many of the cultural materials they inherited, especially those which either illuminated the message of the Scriptures or revealed the relevance of the Scriptures to their daily lives. They were attracted to Augustine’s writings, especially Confessions and On Christian Doctrine, which greatly influenced Puritan writers’ understanding of Christian piety and rhetorical propriety, but they

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52 In theory, typological and allegorical readings differ strikingly from one another, and Puritans opted for the former to achieve a greater degree of exegetical rigor. In practice, however, Puritans employed both typology and allegory in their readings of Scripture, and their exegetical work reveals as much interpretive latitude in typological exegesis as in allegorical exegesis.
were less comfortable with Augustine’s use of Ciceronian rhetoric for the presentation of exegetical content. They returned instead to the Socratic position on rhetoric, stressing the Neo-Platonist bent they found in Paul’s Epistles, which they found corroborated in Augustine’s writings on Christian piety. Puritans’ Socratic cast of mind led them to Ramist dialectic as a method of invention and arrangement divorced from the Ciceronian concern with the style of discourse. Ciceronian rhetoric had emphasized fitting a speech’s style to its substance, whereas Ramist dialectic rendered style a secondary concern, or even unnecessary if the dialectical discourse was clear enough to be understood. This is not to say that Socratic and Ramist discourse was without “style,” but rather that Socrates and Ramus hunted after the matter of discourse, not the words with which to express it. In short, Ramist philosophy offered Puritans an epistemological method virtually emptied of aesthetic concerns.

The reasoning faculty that Ramus assigns to the province of moral philosophy actually comes to serve as the basis for all practical judgment whatsoever in Ramus’ dialectical method. Doubting the verity and “self-evidence” of the apodictic syllogism not merely in the sphere of logical demonstration, but even more so in the realm of practical wisdom, Ramus sought a logical method that might rightly account for the contingent verities of practical life. He sought a third option beyond the ancient tensions between dialectic and rhetoric to assess the problems inherent in both theoretical and practical wisdom without reducing philosophy to rhetoric or rhetoric to philosophy. Ramus therefore wished to revisit and revise classical treatments of the art of rhetoric following Aristotle. For Ramus, Aristotle’s basis of rhetoric in the logic of the practical syllogism or enthymeme was ill-conceived. In order to posit the enthymeme, Aristotle had to revise syllogistic reasoning as a method of rhetorical invention. Invention was instead the exclusive province of dialectic, says Ramus, and an art could only be called an art if it could stand up to dialectical inquiry. To dialectic, then, Ramus moved invention and disposition, leaving to rhetoric
only style and delivery. Ramus believed that dialectic was what reasonable men used to respond
to discursive occasions, not rhetoric, and used rhetoric rather to present conclusions they reached
by logic. Ramus thus observed an “art” of rhetoric, but it was an art very different from dialectic
and the logic(s) it drew upon to create and arrange an argument.

Ramus inherited the Sophistic-Socratic tension between rhetoric and dialectic but
discovered a third option which placed him beyond the problems dividing theoretical from
practical wisdom. Ramus found that for the attainment of theoretical wisdom, one’s judgment
would have to hold necessarily and his propositional logic appear “self-evident” to his auditors.
As Walton shows in “Ramus and the Art of Judgment,” however, Ramus questioned the very
division of theoretical from practical wisdom and the propositional logics that developed from
this division:

The Aristotelian-Scholastic logic [based on the division of theoretical from
practical wisdom] rests its case for the rational syllogism and thus for its account
of theoretical wisdom upon man’s alleged capacity to secure self-evident
intuitions of forms. Without such intuitions there can be no pivotal middle term.
But, Ramus observed, the forms of things are often obscure, or else so
intertwined with that which they inform that we often cannot tell which is which.
Moreover, we lack a privileged position for inquiry; we are ourselves
circumstantially related to things in our world, so that we bring to our
investigation conditions that we find there (Dial., 31-34v). We may stumble on a
form and not recognize it for what it is. Although not denying reality to forms,
Ramus argues that they cannot be self-evidently known. Without “pure
definition” the rational syllogism lacks the terms it requires to function; yet pure
definition must be admitted to be “impossible” (Dial., 30). (153)
Because the forms of things are “obscure” or otherwise “so intertwined with that which they inform,” Ramus questions the self-evidence of the minor premise in syllogistic reasoning. By its very nature the minor or “middle” term slips into the terms that precede and follow it, and the propositional logic to which it gives rise very often calls up the terms’ common usages to treat things in the world. By their very nature the terms cannot be bleached of the connotations they carry from their use in other contexts. Ramus thus recognizes that language mediates reality simply because language and social convention color its terms. Likewise, the investigator into the forms he finds in the world cannot help but condition these forms by the circumstances of his investigation. The investigator brings to the investigation his understanding of the terms he uses to reach conclusions about the world, and the investigation itself becomes the context that shapes the investigator’s relationship to the forms he investigates.

What Ramus recognized in his critique of Aristotelian logic is the impossibility of pure and immediate inquiry, from which he draws two conclusions: “First, he considers necessity and contingency to be a species of the genus contingency (Dial., 2v), because all creation is the artifice of God, on Whom it is contingently dependent in order to live, move, or have any being” (Walton 154). Only God subsists in a privileged position vis-à-vis His creation. That which has form, movement, and being depends upon God “contingently” for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that the reasoning capacity of man cannot presume to know or to find the efficient cause by which things in the world have their form, movement, and being, which leads Ramus to his second conclusion. “Second,” continues Walton, “Ramus defines ‘necessity’ as Aristotle had defined ‘chance’: it is the label men use to ‘explain’ that for which they know no principle or cause (Dial., 6f)” (154). Ramus’s criticism of necessity and theoretical wisdom reveals something of his ontology, for while he treats Aristotle’s four causes in his Dialectic, he treats only Aristotle’s efficient cause at length, concluding from this treatment of causes that
“whatever there is, it is what it is insofar as it is well or poorly made by God or man (Dial., 7v).” For Ramus, then, “form is the result of artful creation, not the cause of it” (154), whether the creator is God or man.

Ramus's ontology thus signals a shift in epistemology from “knowledge as contemplative” to “knowledge as instrumental.” Ramus posits a God by Whom things have their form, movement, and being “not merely as Wise, but as creative, sharing His arts of wise creativity with those who seek His ways by the study of His works” (154). Ramist logic appealed to the Puritan mind for just this reason: The Word and works of God are expressions of theoretical and practical wisdom, for God “knows well what He is doing and does well what He knows to be in need of doing” (154). Ramus opens the possibility of theoretical wisdom, but identifies the purity of such wisdom with God alone. Nevertheless, Ramus redefines efficient causes as “operative principles” rather than as “fixed properties of potency or act,” so that he also opens up the possibility for man to follow God, if not necessarily in His thinking and knowing, then at least contingently through His makings and doings. Ramist dialectic at once acknowledges man’s ignorance and capacity to act—man’s desire to know becoming the operative principle by which he acts in and through creation. Ramus argued for dialectic as the logic of all arts, as Socrates had argued, not just an art of logic.

Alongside his development of a single dialectical logic that he interpreted as Socratic, Walton claims that Ramus had two attendant aims in mind:

to show how the Aristotelian-Scholastic logic was neither useful in practical spheres nor true and certain in its own theoretical sphere . . . and to develop the art of judgment within [his one] dialectic to replace both apodictic intuition and
Aristotle’s dialectic of practical wisdom with one comprehensive view of man’s ability to think. (153)

Aristotle had distinguished the apodictic syllogism from the enthymeme and thus divided theoretical from practical reasoning. The apodictic syllogism belonged to logic and the enthymeme to rhetoric. Ramus was critical not merely of Aristotle’s separation of logical demonstration from practical argument, but also of his categorization of man’s reasoning capacity into different types of reasoning. Ramus thought that his one dialectic answered both problems. It would serve as a single art of judgment whereby man “might be able to seek wisdom within human spheres, rather than consign it to the status of ‘pure’ theory” (153). Because Aristotle had a similar rationale for introducing his enthymeme, Ramus is often criticized for trying to “out-Aristotle” Aristotle and charged with reducing rhetoric to logic or logic to rhetoric.

Having rejected the necessity of “pure theory,” which presupposes man’s capacity to secure self-evident intuitions of forms, Ramus turned to rhetoric, and specifically to the canon of invention, as an art that seeks wisdom within the realm of human contingencies. For centuries, orators had been inventing arguments that would bring their audiences to some measure of the truth without purporting to be “self-evident,” for indeed “self-evidence” requires no persuasion. Ramus deemed the practical wisdom sought by rhetoricians a perfect starting point for any rational inquiry whatsoever and therefore revised rhetorical invention to account for man’s proper condition, as Walton describes it, “in the hinterland between knowledge and ignorance” (155). Using rhetorical invention as his starting point, Ramus developed his dialectic with a Socratic bent.

Mining Plato, Xenophon, and Galen for their respective accounts of Socratic dialectic, Ramus wished to follow Socrates by “refut[ing] false opinions, attempting first of all to raise his
he is seeking ways to inquire into the “simple reasons” of things (Dial. 3). The rhetorician’s art of judgment is internalized, so to speak; rather than an art used in persuading oneself or others, judgment becomes the art of evaluating interrelationships between discoveries. That evaluation enables one, finally, to learn how those discoveries cooperate as variables constituting an operative principle. (155)

Ramus concludes that Socratic dialectic as eminently practical, and perhaps even “rhetorical,” because it aims to raise its hearers above the merely customary by acknowledging that they must work through the customary or the conventional in order to draw inferences from it. Walton notes that Ramus “is not dealing explicitly with rhetoric at this point—with language or common belief.” Rather,

hearers above the sense, prejudices, and traditions of men, in order to lead them to their own natural sense of right and freedom of judgment” (Dialecticae Institutiones, 4, qtd. in Walton 154).

Ramist dialectic couples invention as the art of inquiring into the “simple reasons” of things with judgment or the method by which one interrogates the subject of his inquiry. As with his definition of invention, Ramus also turns to rhetorical tradition to define judgment, offering ten loci communes in place of Aristotle’s ten categories. Ramus thought that Aristotle’s categories closed more than disclosed by their propositional logic, and so he resorted to the rhetorical commonplaces as ten questions or lines of inquiry which need to be considered as “variables” that are likely to occur in common experience: causes, effects, subjects, adjuncts, opposites, comparisons, names, divisions, definitions, and witnesses. After generating more or less persuasive arguments from these various lines of inquiry into his subject, says Ramus, one is ready to dispose his understanding of the subject, perhaps by these commonplaces’ logic.
Because the dialectician aims to articulate the “simple reasons” of things, he must determine the existence and scope of interrelationships between the arguments he has developed. As a species of his judgment, his “method” comprises his arrangement of axioms or “that which is naturally precedent, most clear and well-known . . . such that it is placed in order and declaration as first, and whatever is more obscure follows after, and we [can then] judge completely of the order and of the confusion” (Dial. 55v). The dialectician is man’s proper place as a thinking, reasoning, and moral being, for in Ramus’s system, “human logic reaches its closest approximation to God’s logic at this point, in ‘method’” (Walton 159). As Walton argues,

> The whole art of judgment, culminating in “method,” was not only the center of Ramus’ program for humane studies but was also “the chief instrument of man in the quest for salvation.” As early as 1543, Ramus had argued that his new logic could culminate in the individual’s realization of God’s logic, that the aim of logic was to be able to think in imitation of the way God thinks, to know and to act in imitation of the way He knows and acts. Ramus gradually developed this view to the point of considering philosophy as the way to develop “man’s divinity” (Dial., 64v). (159)

Whereas Augustine follows Cicero in advising readers of *On Christian Doctrine* to listen to and imitate wise and eloquent men to cultivate their own wisdom and eloquence, Ramus advises readers of his *Dialecticae* to learn dialectical method that they might imitate the reasoning and language instrument of God. Nevertheless, much like Augustine’s baptism of Ciceronian rhetoric for Christian ends, Ramus reworked Socratic dialectic for Christian-humanist ends. What mattered most to Puritans, however, was where Augustine and Ramus each located the source of human artifice. Augustine certainly traced eloquence to the Scriptures, which evidence the
supremely rational mind of God, but he advised readers of *On Christian Doctrine* to imitate human models of eloquence if they are to learn anything of eloquence. Ramus, on the other hand, claimed to have found the one human art that directly expresses the supremely rational mind of God and requires no human model to imitate.

Ramus argued that human reason needs cultivation, not imitation to recover its lost relation to God’s infinite wisdom and divine eloquence. Walton offers an apt agricultural metaphor to illustrate the very end that Ramus had in mind:

Insofar as man cultivates the created world by dialectical labor, repairing his postlapsarian forgetfulness by disciplined stages of access to the logic of God’s artifice, in that degree by which [writes Ramus] “man surpasses the beasts by syllogism, by that much do those who use method well, surpass other men: and man’s divinity stands out in no other part of reason so fully as it does in the sunlight of this universal [art of] judgment” (*Dial.*, 64v). (159)

Reminiscent of Augustine’s advancing the Platonic doctrine of *anamnesis* as the ideal of man’s reasoning and language faculties, Ramus also advances his dialectical method as man’s means of recovering the Adamic language whereby man might think as God thinks and communicate as God communicates.\(^{53}\) Where Augustine and Ramus appear to meet is in their Socratic cast of mind, for both Augustine and Ramus advance a “rational faith” grounded in the Platonic doctrine of anamnesis, or the experience of learning as bringing to consciousness what, from an earlier existence, the soul already knows.\(^{54}\) Both offer the language instruments of dialectic and rhetoric

\(^{53}\) It bears repeating that Milton develops both Augustine’s and Ramus’s respective senses of “rational faith” in his notion of *ratio recta* or “right reason.” See footnote 41 above.

\(^{54}\) Ramus seems to have borrowed just as much from Xenophon’s Socrates as he did from Plato’s Socrates. In his writings about the art of invention, Ramus concluded from Plato’s Socrates that “invention is a sort of recollection of the simple reasons of things known by way of experience, [but also concluded from
as the means of recovering some semblance of the prelapsarian mind, but whereas Augustine
privileges rhetoric to dialectic, Ramus favors dialectic to rhetoric.

Walton’s agricultural metaphor is apt given the movement of Ramus’ dialectical method,
whereby the dialectician produces intricate tree structures that look remarkably natural. Ramist
dialectic largely operates according to a binary logic. The dialectician works on his subject by
dividing it into constituent topical pairs, each of which informs the subject in some way, and
thereafter categorizing the pairs as several species of proposition falling into one of ten
propositional commonplaces. The dialectician uses his knowledge of the commonplaces not only
to generate the constituent topical pairs, but also the proposition he makes about them. Starting
from axiomatic propositions and moving increasingly to less certain propositions, the dialectician
can clearly distinguish what is known from what is unknown. Ramus understands dialectic as an
invention strategy to discourse on a subject simply because by using it the dialectician always
finds something more to say on the subject, not only by dividing knowns from unkowns, but also
by increasing the degree of focus on any proposition generated from his investigation into the
subject. Each of the propositions the dialectician generates he can develop into an explanation of
the topic, which allows the dialectician to discourse on both the constituent topics and their

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Xenophon’s Socrates that] recollection . . . is an ability, learned by intercourse with other men and with
one’s circumstances” (Walton 157). For Ramus, then, man must learn how he learns:
[For] no matter how subtle or quick a man may be, [writes Ramus] if he is a stranger to the
customs of a city, [to] its examples, laws, mores, the will of its citizens, [all of which constitute]
those places from which arguments are drawn, his subtle mind will do him no good. We need a
mind which has worked [on those things], as on a field, not cultivated once, but over and over,
“the third time,” so as to bring forth better and larger fruits. But this labor means use, listening,
learning, [experience with] letters and disciplines . . . [For] one’s share [is here as in tilling the
soil], “whatsoever a man sows, that shall he reap.” (Dial., 37v; qtd. in Walton 157)
An echo of the doctrine of, among other places, Acts 10 and Mark 7 (see footnote 45 above), Ramus’s
allusion here to Galatians 6:7 reveals that he envisions the moral and ethical nature of his dialectical
method, that in comprising the arts of invention and judgment, dialectic does not merely show man how he
learns, but also how might use that learning. In short, Ramus reveals in this passage (and elsewhere) both
the logical propriety of his method and the social propriety it is designed to engender.
logical relation to the subject he took as the starting point of his investigation. The dialectician takes each constituent pair as two subjects and divides them in turn into their respective constituent topical pairs, again taking each topic in the pair as a subject worthy of further investigation. He proceeds until he has exhausted his thinking or moved too far away from the subject with which he opened his investigation.55

The web of relations or “tree structures” the dialectician generates by simple binary thinking can often be fascinatingly complex, and Ramus published visual representations of these trees in his treatises on dialectic. Interested as he is in departures from the living, spoken word, Walter Ong examines in Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue the “concept maps” that Ramus himself sketched to illustrate the simplicity of his dialectical method and the intricate patterns of thought it allowed Ramus to develop. Ong notes that in Ramus’ invective against Aristotle, Ramus “frequently resorts to highly mythical self-dramatization, picturing dialectic as a tree of knowledge with golden apples hanging from the boughs (rami) surrounded by screeching and frustrated Aristotelian hobgoblins” (174). The image would certainly have endeared Ramus to the Puritans, for his very name suggests that in systematizing dialectical method, he has recovered part of the lost Adamic logic. Puritans coupled Ramist logic with God’s grace as the twofold means of their regeneration of the prelapsarian state, their return to God from the state of depravity into which all of humanity had fallen.

As Ramus understood his method, the dialectician practices the Adamic language, albeit in degraded form, as he works to recover lost Edenic knowing. Like Adam and Eve, he celebrates God’s works through his own work. Learning the “simple reasons” of things in the world is akin

55 Puritan preachers, such as William Perkins, used Ramist method as a way to invent and dispose their sermons. The preachers practiced division or separation of a topic into several heads to bring order from chaos and clarity from obscurity. They used Ramist method not merely to cover the topics of their sermons fully, but also to clarify the darker places in scripture by interrogating that topic according to the commonplaces that Ramus offered.
to digging in the garden’s soil to discover things’ causes, and the dialectical method he practices serves as a check against the kind of growth that obscures them. For Ramus, then, cultivation of the mind of man is the end of practice, but what of the method? Plato’s Socrates had inspired Ramus to develop a dialectical method that would proceed according to three basic laws:

The first law, *du tout* (of the whole) requires delimitation of the subject-matter by discerning those relationships (“links”) which set off a working whole from impertinent findings. The second law, *par soy* (by itself) focuses on correlation of variables as constitutive of the thing by itself. The culminating law, *universel premièrement* (primarily universal) seeks the highest level of intelligibility by coordination of relations of the first with those of the second level in order to bring out comprehensive “reciprocal” relationships. (Walton 158)

As an art of judgment, Ramist dialectic aims to bring order out of previously unordered materials by the dialectician’s first establishing limits between relevant and irrelevant materials to define more clearly the subject of his inquiry. The dialectician then proceeds to promote invention and discovery by identifying links, relationships, and reasons where he presently finds none. Finally, the dialectician arranges known relationships as axioms that he thereafter uses to light his way into increasingly obscure and unknown relationships.

Ramus credits Plato’s Socrates for developing this particular method and cites *Philebus* as the text in which Socrates discusses the problem of inquiry into forms as dialectical wholes. Socrates advised that the dialectician ought to proceed from a single form to a plurality of forms, and so make his way from the “definite” to the “indefinite” and by so doing become aware of the limits of his knowledge. Socrates had claimed that his own dialectical inquiry always proceeded from and presupposed his own ignorance, which put him in a position to interrogate subject
matter that others deemed already settled and to distinguish more clearly the tentatively definite from the indefinite. With this method he sought to dismantle wholes into their constituent parts and reintegrate the parts to discover new wholes. In other words, dialectical method as Socrates posited it and Ramus advanced it was entirely *inventive* in its interrogation of established truths and its discovery of new truths.

Ramus was first a pedagogue, so he developed a method that was easy to learn and easy to apply. His particular brand of dialectic came to replace the complex logics developed by the ancients as well as the rhetorics predicated upon these logics. Ramus hoped to offer a method that was epistemologically relevant in that it captured the essence of human learning. He also hoped that his method might be used as a means of recovering the way of knowing and naming from which all of humanity had fallen in the commission of original sin. In this way, Ramus is similar to Augustine, for both men hoped to recover the logic and language of prelapsarian man.

Augustine focused on the language; Ramus on the logic. The proportional logic that underwrites Augustine’s understanding of rhetorical propriety approaches wholes and parts, specifically how parts fit into the wholes. Part of the aesthetic experience, for Augustine, was the pleasure one receives from recognizing the beauty of the parts’ “fittingness” in the whole, which is beautiful in itself. If Scripture is Augustine’s example, then his *rhetoric* of propriety is how the different styles and genres in which the Bible is written “fit” the whole of Scripture. At first, the Scriptures’ rhetoric appeared ugly to Augustine, for, contrary to his Ciceronian training, they presented a discordant rhetoric. His increasing faith showed him, however, that these seeming discordances actually presented an underlying and harmonizing logic, which he grounded in his notion of *caritas*. Reading the Scriptures with a sense of Christian love offered Augustine a unified rhetoric, whereby he read each difficult passage against the Scriptures’ whole message—the individual’s relationship to the One God. Augustine focused on *how* the parts fit into the
whole: *how* certain passages fit into the whole of Scripture and *how* individual Christians read their common experiences as evidence of their place in the divine plan, Augustine developed an aesthetical epistemology that privileged the *aesthetic* in privileging the *rhetoric* of propriety. His grounding in Ciceronian rhetoric further supports the direction his aesthetical epistemology takes in the development of his faith and writings.

What Ramus shares with Augustine is the Platonic bent of his thinking, his faith that the recovery of ideal logic or rhetoric is possible. Where he departs from Augustine is in his method, for Ramus parses the aesthetical epistemology that had become the substance of the Sophistic-Socratic debate, which Ramus entered into as a teacher of logic. Ramus relegated aesthetic concerns exclusively to the art of rhetoric, in which he included style and other elements of good elocution. To dialectic, Ramus conferred invention and arrangement as species of epistemological judgment and method. Ramist method deals in proportions, much like Augustine’s proportional logic, but proportions of a different kind. The difficult places in Scripture, for example, Ramus, or more precisely, Puritans using Ramist method, did not approach as an aesthetical or rhetorical problem of *how* certain passages fit into the whole of Scripture. Rather, Puritans using Ramist philosophy dealt with difficult passages in Scripture as “unknowns,” situating them against Scriptural axioms about which they could be more or less certain. Ramist dialectic reinforced the reading practice of reading obscure passages alongside clear passages whose message or intent struck the reader as similar. It also offered preachers a method for presenting Scriptural truths to their congregations that they might be applied to contingencies of everyday life. As an epistemological tool, then, Ramist dialectic offered Puritans a method for examining *how* a reader of the Scriptures arrives at doctrine and its application. Chapter 3 treats one Puritan preaching manual in the vein of Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine*—William Perkins’ *The Art of Prophesying*—and how Perkins squares typological rhetoric, which served as Puritans’ primary
method for reading and applying the Scriptures to everyday life, with methods of invention and presentation they received from Augustine and revised in light of Ramus’ writings on dialectical method. What Perkins achieves in his sermon manual, which certainly influences Puritan ministers writing in Perkins’ wake, is an antithetical pairing of Ciceronian rhetorical principles and Ramist dialectical method that rivals only the Bible itself in its “mixing” of styles.

Works Cited


Chapter 3

William Perkins’ *The Art of Prophesying:*

Proprietary-Thinking as Preparation for Inspiration

The title of William Perkins’ very influential sermon manual evidences what is so “peculiar” about Puritan sermon rhetoric. The *art* of prophesying suggests that Perkins is primarily concerned with sermon method and theorizing proper approaches to Scriptural exegesis and presentation. In both the organization and presentation of his manual, Perkins follows Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine,* though he departs from Augustine in several important respects.  

First, because Augustine’s sermon manual is so heavily influenced by Ciceronian rhetorical principles, Perkins attempts to distance his own manual from any overtly “rhetorical” treatment of sermon writing or delivery; however, Perkins’ knowledge of the medieval manuals on *ars praedicandi,* including Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine,* becomes most apparent when he attempts to replace references to classical rhetorical principles with the logical method of Petrus Ramus. To distance his method from Augustine’s, Perkins presents his argument using Ramus dialectic, arranging his treatment of the art into clearly delineated logical pairs, but in method, he follows Augustine, whose *On Christian Doctrine* is written using the very Ciceronian style he advises novice preachers to follow. Perkins’ *art* thus achieves a peculiar blending of

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56 I discuss the similarities between the organization of Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine* and Perkins’ *The Art of Prophesying* at greater length below. In short, Perkins divides his sermon manual much like Augustine into “discovering” and “presenting” the message of Scripture. Perkins is perhaps clearer than Augustine about his observing rhetorical propriety in both the *discovery* of the sermon’s materials, titling this section of his manual “Principles for Expounding Scripture,” and the sermon’s *presentation,* titling this section of his manual “Rightly Handling the Word of God.”
Ciceronian rhetoric and Ramist logic, even as Perkins, like Augustine, was loath to admit that classical rhetorical principles are useful for the Christian preaching arts.

Second, Perkins’ “Puritan” rhetoric grows from and further develops Augustine’s early dialectical examination of language as an aesthetical and epistemological medium for religious conversion. Although Perkins avoids aesthetics as a rhetorical endeavor, emphasizing instead stylistic plainness, still his manual discloses that prophesying is an artistic use of language, both in the sermon writer’s style and delivery of his sermon. Basing his arguments for stylistic plainness upon Paul’s injunction to preachers in several of his epistles to preach the power of Christ’s plain and simple ministry of the cross, Perkins makes every effort in his manual to emphasize the power of prophesying as being already beyond anything the rhetorical arts might add to it. Language, in this view, simply functions as an epistemological tool for conveying to Christians the spiritual truth of Christ’s ministry as it gets related in the gospels and the writings of Paul. The Scriptures’ message speaks for itself far beyond man’s power to add or detract. In *The Art of Prophesying*, then, Perkins brings together in proper measure both the (aesthetical, rhetorical) art of preaching and the (epistemological, spiritual) suggestion that the preacher can already find written in the Scriptures all that he and his congregants require for proper inspiration.

57 Like many Puritans, Perkins was a nominal practitioner and advocate of plain style; his view was that discourse was merely an instrument for conveying knowledge—an “epistemological tool.” However, Puritan preachers’ desire to move their hearers to embrace the Word in and of itself, through the stylistic transparency of their preaching, necessitated that they concern themselves with the style of their discourse. They found a ready repository of the theory and practice of plain style in the medieval *ars praedicandi*, though they distanced themselves from overt references to plain style’s grounding in classical rhetorical principles.

58 Paul characterizes the persuasive power of Christ’s ministry as being beyond the rhetorical effects individual Christians might deliver in their teaching or preaching the Word of God. In 1 Corinthians, for instance, Paul writes, “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect” (1:17), and again, “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power” (2:4), and once more in 2 Corinthians, “I may not be a trained speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way” (11:6). Pauline doctrine offered Perkins sufficient Scriptural warrant for his dismissal of classical rhetoric and his use of plain style in his discussion and practice of the preaching arts, and sufficient Scriptural warrant for his advancing of Ramist philosophy for the “demonstration of the Spirit’s power” in the Scriptures and his own inspired preaching of the Scriptures.
Perry Miller notes in his chapter on “Rhetoric” in *The England Mind*, for instance, that Puritan sermon rhetoric required that “the agents of conversion be addressed simultaneously to both the rational and sensible souls” so that “[a] preacher who hoped to bring sinners to repentance would need to construct his sermons so that they appealed at every point both to intellect and passion” (300). Perkins, of course, understood like the medieval preachers before him that, as the primary means of conversion, the sermon required that congregants be given both Scriptural doctrine, that they might reach understanding and illumination, and exhortation, that they might be roused to the proper emotional response upon receiving the Scriptures’ message. To meet these demands, Perkins measures Augustine’s advice on sermon style with Ramist logic and a healthy degree of Biblicism grounded squarely in Calvinist theology. For Perkins, a preacher’s style of writing and delivery arise less from his study of the art of rhetoric than from his being called to prophesy the Word of God by the Spirit of God. As Miller again observes, “William Perkins [once] declared that ‘he must first bee godly affected himselfe, who would stirre up godly affected affectations in other men,’ that before the minister attempts to arouse others he should first privately arouse himself” (301). For Perkins, then, effective preaching requires the minister to become inspired by the Spirit of God in the Scriptures so that he can inspire, or move, his congregants; to use the same degree of affect in his sermon style that he himself feels about the Scriptures’ personal affect upon him so that he can delight his congregants; and to leaven both the ethical and emotional appeal with Ramist logic and plain style so that he can teach the Scriptures’ doctrine to his congregants. Though he distances himself from classical rhetorical principles, the balance between aesthetics and epistemology that Perkins achieves in *The Art of Prophesying* belies the Ciceronian oratorical offices at its heart.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ In his study *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance*, James Murphy argues that it is difficult to piece together “any coherent body of precepts that
In the Puritan imagination, the art of “prophesying” was a species of rhetoric that crossed several genres. Aligned with the function of deliberative rhetoric, Puritans viewed prophesying as future-oriented. To “prophesy” meant not only to predict future events, like the coming of the messiah, but also to persuade others to prepare their souls for this event. Puritans considered prophesy divinely inspired declarations of divine will and purpose and believed that the preacher’s vocation was to mediate God’s will to man. The prophet aimed to open to his congregation the will of God as it gets articulated in the Scriptures, and he used two methods to realize this aim: the first was present-oriented and aligned with the function of occasional rhetoric; the second was past-oriented and aligned with the function of forensic rhetoric.

Preachers exhorted believers and unbelievers alike to repent their sins. Preachers meant their exhortations to believers to have the occasional effects of edifying them with sound Christian

might be called a rhetoric of preaching” (298) prior to 1200. Murphy traces this non-descript or anti-theoretical quality of Christian rhetoric that so resists easy definition before the Renaissance to the “conversational style” that characterized the medieval homiletic tradition. One of the major ironies of the period, continues Murphy, was that the ideal of plain and simple discourse arose from a rather “sizable group of nontheorists and antitheorists, actually engaged in preaching, who as a matter of principle rejected the idea of systematic theory” (300). Somewhat like Cicero in this regard, practitioners of stylistic plainness wrote and delivered sermons in plain style, thus demonstrating a theory or doctrine of plain style without clearly setting down its “rules.” The patristic writers’ silence on the ideal of rhetorical plainness positions rhetorical propriety at the heart of Christian rhetorical concern, much like rhetorical propriety had become the absent center of Cicero’s conception of the perfect orator—an ideal orator possessing great skill in a number of arts and able to suit his discourse to meet the contingencies of his rhetorical situation and the variegated audiences he might encounter there. As Peter Auksi observes in Christian Plain Style: The Evolution of a Spiritual Ideal, “theorizing on rhetorical simplicity [is primarily motivated by a concern with] decorum”:

Often apologists, exegetes, and preachers alike turn aside from the subject at hand and discuss the selection of an appropriate and fitting style or medium for their words, especially one that is more responsive than classical models to author, subject, and audience in a Christian setting. Truth, they point out, does not need to be decked out in self-aggrandizing, duplicitous, or ostentatious language. Christian students need to understand uncomplicated precepts quickly and lucidly; Christian teachers must express themselves in a humble, meek, and accessible manner. (11) The concerns of the Christian writer echo at least one of Cicero’s “classical” rhetorical concerns—that the first duty of the orator is to instruct his hearers in the message or precept he would like to impart to them. To meet this obligation, the plain style suits best, but given the variegated knowledge and needs of his audience, the orator must still “deck” or “dress” his discourse using some of the same techniques he might otherwise employ to produce more elevated and ornate discourse. In The Art of Prophesying, Perkins devotes several chapters to categorizing different classes of hearers by their spiritual knowledge and needs that the preacher might select the most appropriate style and discourse to teach, delight, and move them.
doctrine (the law) and comforting them with periodic celebrations of God’s mercy and grace (the gospel). Preachers meant their exhortations to unbelievers to have the forensic effect of convincing them of their sinfulness, to move them from conviction to belief. As Perkins writes in his introduction to *The Art of Prophesying*,

> The study of prophesying involves a commitment of the mind to acquire the ability to exercise prophesy rightly. Prophecy (or prophesying) is a solemn public utterance by the prophet, related to the worship of God and the salvation of our neighbors, as the following passages indicate: ‘But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men’ (*1 Cor. 14*:3). ‘But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all’ (*1 Cor. 14*:24). ‘For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son’ (*Rom. 1*:9). (Perkins 5)

Perkins backs his definition of the art with Scriptural support from Paul’s epistles. Pauline doctrine, particularly in the two passages Perkins cites from *1 Corinthians*, suggests that preaching may have one purpose, but its varied audiences demand that the preacher utilize several rhetorical methods that cross the three classical genres.

Unlike the classical authors who wrote many treatises on rhetoric but few rhetoric textbooks, Perkins wrote his preaching manual *The Art of Prophesying* based on the assumption that even without a natural speaking ability, aspiring ministers might acquire and exercise the art by careful study—an assumption several classical authors doubted very much.⁶⁰ Still, Perkins

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⁶⁰ Following Isocrates, Quintilian is one of the few Latin writers on the art of rhetoric who argues that rhetoric can indeed be taught. He devotes one section of his *Institutes* to the question: “Which matters more, nature or teaching?” (2.19). Quintilian writes that both nature and teaching must be present for the cultivation of the ideal orator, for just as the process of cultivation is necessary to capitalize on the natural fertility of the soil, the teacher must have a shaping influence on the natural abilities of the orator. Leaving
states in the very opening line of his manual that “to exercise prophesy rightly” careful study must be coupled with a “commitment of the mind.” Like the classical authors following Aristotle, Perkins understands that the art of “solemn public utterance” entails two language excellences: clarity and propriety. Clarity ensures the preacher communicates his message to his congregation. Propriety ensures the preacher communicates the right message the right way. Perkins shows his concern with rhetorical propriety in several places in *The Art of Prophesying*. Like Augustine, he first treats the proper method for *discovering* the right message in “Principles for Expounding Scripture” and then treats the proper method for *presenting* the right message the right way in “Rightly Handling the Word of God.”

**Beyond Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine***:

one with natural talent uninstructed is akin to leaving fertile ground uncultivated; instructing one without any natural talent is like cultivating barren ground. St. Augustine is less optimistic. Near the opening of Book IV of *On Christian Doctrine* Augustine cites the authority of the great orators living a generation before Cicero, whom Cicero imagines in his dialogue *On Oratory* debating the question of whether rhetoric can ever be taught to students who are without some natural ability: “Even the luminaries of Roman eloquence were happy to say that if [the rules of eloquence] could not be learnt quickly they could never be properly learnt at all” (103). Learning the art quickly of course suggests that the student possesses some natural ability with language. Without natural ability, Augustine contends, the rules of eloquence are little benefit to the student of rhetoric:

> In the absence of such ability the rules of eloquence cannot be learnt, and even if they are laboriously drummed in and assimilated to some extent they are of no benefit. For even those who have learnt the rules and speak fluently and stylishly are not all able to consider them as they speak in order to make sure that they are following them (unless of course they are discussing the actual rules). Indeed I think there are hardly any who are capable of doing both, that is, speaking well and considering as they speak the rules of eloquence which promote good speaking. There is a danger of forgetting what one has to say while working out a clever way to say it . . . [Eloquent men] observe the rules because they are eloquent; they do not use them to become eloquent. (102-03)

Augustine, who follows Cicero on this point, argues that students of rhetoric learn the rules of eloquence by listening to eloquent men speak and imitating them. The rules are gleaned and set down by men who already possess some natural speaking ability, for, as Augustine points out, the art presupposes some degree of spontaneity. One invents “on the fly,” using the rules of eloquence simultaneously while he speaks, not thinking of the rules in order to speak or, what is worse, while speaking. Augustine’s understanding of rhetoric in his preaching manual differs from Perkins’ understanding in that Augustine has extemporaneous preaching in mind. See John D. Schaeffer’s “The Dialectic of Orality and Literacy” for a fuller treatment of Augustine’s view of rhetoric as an oratorical art.
Perkins’ Synthesis of Ramist Dialectic and Classical Rhetoric

Perkins’ assumption that students of the ministry can learn the art of prophesying from his manual also means that he assumes a different form of preaching from earlier sermon manuals like St. Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine*. Augustine’s discussion of the exegetical and preaching arts was based strongly in the classical tradition of rhetoric, which approached rhetoric predominantly as an oratorical art. Perkins’ discussion of the exegetical and preaching arts, on the other hand, was heavily influenced by the many reforms Petrus Ramus made to the classical tradition of rhetoric. Ramus effectively reordered the five classical canons of rhetoric as Cicero had parsed them and passed them down through Quintilian to the Renaissance. The five classical canons included invention, the principle of discovering the available means of persuasion; disposition, the principle of effectively selecting and arranging an argument; elocution, the principle of presenting the argument cogently and eloquently; memory, the principle of speaking extemporaneously; and delivery, the principle of effectively punctuating the presentation by use of voice and gesture. Ramus removed from classical rhetoric the canons of invention and disposition, making them instead principles of dialectic. For Ramus, invention and disposition were counterpart faculties in the art of dialectic, which he defined as “the ability to discourse” or “the power of discoursing” (Ong 176). In the activity of “discoursing” Ramus understood the practice of dialectic or “disputing” doubtful propositions, and so he saw dialectic serving a rhetorical purpose.

Aristotle had come to define the very art of rhetoric itself using its chief canon—invention—as his starting point, concluding that rhetoric was the art of seeing in each particular case the available means of persuasion. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle argues that dialectic and rhetoric
are “counterpart arts.” That Ramus replaced invention and disposition as a faculty of dialectic reduced rhetoric to little more than elocution, memory, and delivery. Walter Ong points out in *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* that it was largely the rise of print culture that had shaped Ramus’ understanding of classical rhetoric’s ordering of the conceptual faculties of invention and disposition. Both of these faculties work from mental images, constructed using metaphors of sight: *seeing* the available means of persuasion and *arranging* the argument. The shift Ong notes is from orality to literacy, from the spoken word to the written word, from the oral-aural word image to the scripted presentation of thoughts and concepts. Though Ramus did not entirely relegate “oration” to rhetoric, for he viewed oral dispute as a part of dialectic, the way he presented the changes he made to the classical rhetorical canons was largely visual. He developed intricate concept maps of ideas to demonstrate the faculties of invention and disposition, and, in essence, he used a method of binary logic for “seeing” and “arranging” these ideas. Ramus’ form of binary logic had a profound influence on Perkins’ understanding of the preaching arts.  

Perkins was presented with Ramist dialectic as a student at Christ’s College, Cambridge, where he came under the tutelage of Laurence Chaderton. Chaderton was largely responsible for introducing Ramus’ work in his lectures to Cambridge students, and like many other English Puritan divines, Perkins understood its pedagogical value. Ramist dialectic operates and unfolds through a kind of twofold logic whereby the dialectician divides the subject of his inquiry into constituent topical pairs. The logical relation the dialectician sees between the subject and the constituent pairs into which he parses the subject falls into one of ten commonplaces: causes, effects, subjects, adjuncts, opposites, comparisons, names, divisions, definitions, and witnesses.

He generates propositions about each topic in the pair, exploring the logical relation between pair and subject and developing the proposition at greater length. Ramist dialectic holds pedagogical value in its sheer simplicity as an invention strategy and method of arrangement. Ramist dialecticians often produce quite complex systems of relations using simple binary thinking. Perkins drew heavily on Ramist dialectic to invent and arrange the subject of prophesy in his preaching manual *The Art of Prophesying*. Readers of the treatise have noted his twofold division of his subject into constituent topical pairs. Perkins approaches the very subject of prophesy as consisting of two parts, preaching and praying. For Perkins, praying serves a preparatory function in prophesying. It readies the soul for inspiration, the influx of the Holy Spirit. Preaching concerns the minister’s presenting to his congregation the discoveries he made while praying. Perkins divides the second of his constituent pair, preaching, into preparation and proclamation. He treats preparation as involving the practice of interpretation and division. In division he includes partition and application (Ferguson xii). Each set of constituent pairs the dialectician develops opens new subjects worthy of deeper exploration. Ramist dialectic thus affords the dialectician a simple, yet powerful analytical tool for understanding and explaining any subject. Perkins uses it first to comprehend and then to present the subject of prophesy clearly and comprehensively to his readers.

Perkins also used Ramist dialectic to treat the topic of “double predestination,” of which he became a major proponent in England. John Calvin’s doctrine of predestination teaches that in being (not becoming) eternal, God knows outside of time, that He is not bound by the syntactical and discursive limits of human thought and reasoning. By His divine prescience, then, God foresees in the progress of human time who will be saved and who will be damned. All are alike damned, having been born with the stain of original sin, but God appoints some to receive His irresistible saving grace; the rest He allows to wander in sin. A disciple of Calvin, Theodore Beza
developed Calvin’s doctrine of predestination into a famous flow chart of salvation and
damnation, which Perkins was instrumental in publishing in England. The chart closely resembles
the visual representations Ramus published to illustrate the intricacies of his dialectical method.

Like Ramus’ concept maps, Perkins published an intricate tree structure showing the
operations of “double predestination” as Beza understood it. He situates God at the top of the
chart. God’s divine aspects—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—form an equilateral triangle around
Him. Directly underneath the Trinity is “God’s Foreknowledge” and “God’s Divine Decree,”
both of which Beza places in the same circle, positioning foreknowledge directly above decree.
Directly underneath, but overlapping “God’s Foreknowledge and Divine Decree” is
“Predestination,” from which directly follow “Creation,” “The Fall of Adam,” and “The State of
Unbelief.” Flanked on either side of “Predestination” are God’s two divine decrees, “The Decree
of Election,” from which follows Beza’s complete examination of the causes and contingencies of
God’s election and grace and man’s salvation, and “The Decree of Reprobation,” from which
follows Beza’s complete examination of the causes of God’s preterition of the reprobate and their
ultimate damnation. The chart flows outward through these various causes and contingencies,
some of which Beza connects in interesting ways, but both the elect and the reprobate come back
together at the middle axis, whose beginning is the creation and the fall of man, whose center is
Christ’s birth, life, death, resurrection, and intercession on behalf of man, and whose end is man’s
appointed death and last judgment. Beginning his visual treatment of “double predestination”
with two decrees, “The Decree of Election” and “The Decree of Reprobation,” Beza closes his
chart with two declarations, “The Declaration of God’s Justice and Mercy” and “The Declaration
of God’s Justice.” God reserves His mercy for the elect alone. Both declarations flow into “God’s
Glory,” the mirror image of the Trinity.
As the diagrams show, Perkins’ translation of Beza’s chart of “double predestination” is far more intricate than can be depicted in syntax. Structurally speaking, Ramist dialectic attempts to approximate two-dimensional, visual representation in its binary logic. By revisiting connections among constituent pairs, the dialectician can examine his subject along two axes. Using Perkins’ divisions of the subject of prophesy, for example, a step back from the different parts of the argument reveals a two-dimensional structure:

![Diagram](image)

Figure 3

One axis takes the reader from prophesy, to preaching, to preparation, to division, and finally to application. But Perkins and the sermon writers following him, who also used Ramist method to divide their sermons, very often explored connections along the other axis as well, showing for instance how praying informs preaching or dividing “proclamation” into constituent topics and exploring the connections between these topics and the subtopics of “preparation,” that is, “interpretation” and “division.”

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62 Figure 1 above is a facsimile of Theodore Beza’s visual reproduction of John Calvin’s notion of “double predestination.” Figure 2 shows facsimiles of Williams Perkins’ representation of Beza’s chart. Figure 3 represents the structure of Perkins’ argument in *The Art of Prophesying*. Puritan preachers developed and presented their theological understanding using highly visual (and essentially Ramist) organizational schemes.
The form of dialectic that Ramus introduced offered Puritan divines a dialectical rhetoric by which they might teach their congregations through demonstration. Of the three oratorical offices they inherited from Cicero, ministers valued teaching above the attendant offices of delighting and moving. The highly structured, comprehensive, and very often intricate treatments of Scripture sermon writers produced using Ramist logic begged further analysis by their congregations. A preacher’s demonstrations of church doctrine in the Scriptures established a common ground between him and his congregation. Ostensibly using the same analytical tools to draw the same or similar conclusions, the preacher positioned his congregation dialogically so that his congregants might test the truth value of his discourse, weigh his readings of Scripture, and consider his instructions for its application against their own conclusions. To achieve such

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63 Donald K. McKim argues in “The Functions of Ramism in William Perkins’ Theology,” for instance, that Perkins discovered in Ramist philosophy “a dynamic unity between theology and ethics” (508). McKim claims that Ramus and Perkins both offered definitions of theology that were distinctly ethical in their emphasis. Ramus said that theology was “the art of living well” (bene vivendi) and Perkins wrote that “theologie, is the science of liuing blessedly for euer” (508). Perkins wrote several theological treatises dealing not only with “right belief,” but also with “right living,” addressing the specific practical and ethical problems that make Christian living difficult. Emphasizing the “uses” or “application” of theological doctrines, Perkins felt that ethical living was the expression of right belief and that the Christian could not act ethically unless his actions were informed by right belief. For Perkins, then, “proper teaching led to proper action” (508), which is a statement McKim borrows from Keith L. Sprunger’s 1966 article on Ramus’ influence on Puritan divines, “Ames, Ramus, and the Method of Puritan Theology.” Sprunger argues that “For Ramus, proper teaching led to proper action” (137). McKim nowhere addresses in this essay Perkins’ rhetoric of propriety or Perkins’ estimation of the propriety of rhetoric in the teaching of right belief and right living; however, McKim does point out that Ramist method helped Perkins and other Puritan divines draw from abstract theological axioms practical, ethical advice that their congregants might apply to their day-to-day lives.

64 In “How-To Books, Protestant Kinetics, and the Art of Theology,” Lori Anne Ferrell traces the publication history of early modern “how-to” manuals and the effects they had on the teaching of theology, particularly Calvinist doctrine. Ferrell argues that “English Calvinism owed more to useful English books than to systematic Continental theologies” (592). Coupled with an English clergy trained in new pedagogies, such as Ramist method, whereby they might reach a wider audience of laypeople, the books that were issuing from England’s presses between 1560 and 1640 were designed in “engagingly tactile formats” that “encouraged hands-on participation as a vital aspect of the learning process” (592). Such texts invited readers to engage not merely with their written, but also their material contents: “to unfold tables, manipulate spinners, cut out paper tools, and trace diagrams with their fingers” (592). This degree of participation in the learning process, concludes Ferrell, rendered complex theological systems like Calvinism more accessible to laypeople. Ferrell examines the “kinetic qualities” of William Perkins’ bestselling Calvinist teaching text, A Golden Chaine (1590), to exemplify the new pedagogical style being
clarity in the discourse, both preacher and congregant had to subscribe to the same exegetical methods. A minister’s teachings might also be said to have delighted and moved the most pious of the reformed congregants when they recognized the intricate patterns inherent in their minister’s sermon. Its symmetry was a thing of beauty. Add to this organizational symmetry the kind of stylistic simplicity and charm colloquial language affords the speaker, and the congregation is presented with a powerful “aesthetic epistemology” that trades on proportion and plainness, a kind of expression worthy of “spiritual taste.”

Of plain style, which Puritan ministers coupled with organizational symmetry in their sermons, Sinclair B. Ferguson writes,

The form of plain style was as follows: the preaching portion, be it text or passage, was explained in its context; the doctrine, or central teaching of the passage was expounded clearly and concisely; and then careful application to the hearers followed in further explanation of the ‘uses’. Thus the message of the Scriptures was brought home in personal and practical, as well as congregational and national applications to the hearers. What does Scripture teach? How does this apply to us today? What are we to do in response? How does Scripture teach

embaced by the English clergy. Although Ferrell says nothing of the propriety of the text in the teaching of Calvinist doctrine, she does point out that, as “how-to” manuals, these manuals found new methods for rendering their contents clear to readers. The “participatory” nature of Puritan preaching Lisa Gordis also examines in her book, Opening Scripture, in which Gordis concludes that the dissolution of the Puritan community into various Protestant sects was the unforeseen result of preachers’ teaching their congregations to open the Scriptures for themselves. Gordis argues, for instance, that the methods of Scriptural exegesis advanced by the first generation of New England ministers allowed for “great interpretive flexibility,” which created a “fluidity [of interpretation that] contributed to the controversies that threatened to destroy the holy community in Massachusetts Bay” (3).

65 See Chapter 1 for my treatment of Augustine’s developing theory of proportions, from aesthetics, to ethics, to theology. See Chapter 2 for my treatment of Augustine’s theory of proportions as the basis of the Augustinian strain of piety and propriety and the influence Augustine’s understanding of Christian piety had upon Puritan rhetoric and poetics. Ramist logic not only approximates Augustine’s proportional thinking in its symmetry, but in its aesthetic as pious discourse approximating the beautiful and rational unity that Augustine considered an expression of the mind of God.
us to do it? These became the issues handled with seriousness and vigour in the pulpit. Biblical and classical erudition was frequently present, but usually veiled; the sermons of many plain-style preachers scintillated with vivid language and illuminating illustration; but the main business was to preach Christ and to reach the heart. Everything was subservient to this. (ix-x)

Ferguson aligns Cicero’s three oratorical offices in the preacher’s art: his first duty is to teach, but his “main business [is] to reach the heart[s]” of his congregants. Plain style affords the preacher a means to teach, delight, and move his congregants because it allows him to explain the doctrine of any particular Scriptural passage clearly and concisely to his congregation and connect the passage’s message to both “personal and practical, as well as congregational and national applications.” Likewise, to instruct, delight, and move his audience, the preacher might resort to “vivid language and illuminating illustration” to unfold and apply the Scriptural message in a simple and direct, yet vigorous and imaginative manner.

Having said something about plain style’s form, Ferguson also addresses how the antithetical characteristics of stylistic plainness address themselves to a variegated audience:

Not that plain style was lacking in wit or in the powerful use of the imagination; but the employment of these was always aimed at the mind in order to affect the conscience, and not merely to impress and delight aesthetic taste by clever oratory or a display of education and learning. In the plain style, spiritual taste was everything; only those who possessed it appreciated the ‘pure spiritual milk’ of biblical teaching. (ix)

Perkins’ own pulpit ministry exemplified plain style to his contemporaries, and his sermon manual The Art of Prophesying demonstrated its efficacy to Puritan ministers following his death in 1602. Perkins played a crucial role in realigning Puritan rhetoric and theology in plain style,
which he believed conformed better to the apostolic standard of being “the open manifestation of the truth” (2 Cor. 4:2) marked by “plainness of speech” (2 Cor. 3:12) than the “witty” sermons that became the fashion of the Anglican Church. By realigning Puritan rhetoric with Puritan theology, Perkins helped shape Puritan propriety, a convergence of rhetorical propriety and spiritual piety.

Perkins synthesizes plain style and organizational symmetry from the very opening of The Art of Prophesying. In his Preface to the reader, Perkins claims that he has endeavored to present the art of preaching in the clearest and most effective manner he knows how, hoping to persuade his readers of the style of preaching espoused by reformed theologians. Perkins uses both plain style and Ramist divisions in his treatment of the art, and so illustrates the preaching arts using the very methods he recommends to his readers—something Cicero had done in his treatment of rhetoric in On the Orator and Ramus had done in his treatment of dialectic in Arguments in Rhetoric against Quintilian. Clearly following Ramus in his presentation of the preaching arts, Perkins’ primary purpose is to persuade aspiring ministers to learn and adopt Ramist method to allow the Scriptures to “speak” for themselves. Perkins takes pains to avoid the art of rhetoric in The Art of Prophesying, suggesting that prayer and inspiration afford the preacher the means of reaching his audience. The “peculiar” rhetoric of the Scriptures, as Augustine had pointed out in On Christian Doctrine, address themselves to a variegated audience in a variegated style, presenting at once “mountainous difficulty” to the uninitiated or prideful that they might be humbled or messages “enveloped in mysteries” to those, like the younger Augustine himself, esteem stylistic plainness bland or dry, and as such, rhetorically ineffective (40).
Perkins offers his purpose for publishing *The Art of Prophesying* in the Preface, echoing one of Augustine’s favorite metaphors—“walking in the way versus wandering out of the way”—to appeal to the spiritual piety and rhetorical propriety of his readers:

I have . . . carefully studied the writings of the theologians, composed a series of rules and principles from their teaching, and tried to explain them in a way that will be both useful and easily remembered.

I am now committing these reflections on preaching to print—to be approved if they have any value, to be criticized and rejected if they have any inadequacies. If you are persuaded of this style of preaching, walk on with me; if you have doubts, inquire with me; if you begin to see points at which you have wandered, come back on to the right path; if you see that I have strayed, call me back to the road you are on. (4)

Like St. Augustine, Perkins wrote his preaching manual to instruct ministers of the Word which “way to walk” in the faith, aligning rhetoric and piety in preaching under rhetorical propriety. Also like Augustine, Perkins minimizes the role rhetoric plays in the preaching arts, though its use and importance in preaching is everywhere apparent in his manual. As he writes in his Preface, “If you are persuaded of this style of preaching, walk on with me . . . ”

Perkins opens his Preface acknowledging that preaching may be a quotidian task for the minister, but quickly follows that there is no more difficult challenge in the theological disciplines than homiletics—that it is “a tremendous responsibility and by no means easy” (3). To ensure its “dignity,” then, Perkins introduces preaching’s “twofold value: (1) It is instrumental in gathering the church and bringing together all of the elect; (2) It drives away the wolves from the folds of the Lord” (3). The challenge of homiletics lay in its persuasive appeal, whereby the
minister in one and the same sermon attracts the righteous and repels the reprobate; the minister’s “tremendous responsibility” lay in fact that his sermon is the instrument by which he separates righteous from reprobate congregants and ensures the purity of his church. That righteous and reprobate very often comprise one and the same congregation is a challenge Augustine addresses in several of his writings on church discipline, also emphasizing the dignity of the minister’s office and the power of his sermon to effect proper fellowship among church members. The sermon thus has the twofold end of gathering together and edifying God’s elect and reproving those foreordained to damnation to dissuade them from entering the fold and potentially corrupting the flock. The means to these two ends, of course, is the sermon itself, a language instrument with much rhetorical force and dignity.

In an interesting rhetorical move also reminiscent of Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine* Perkins draws directly on classical rhetorical principles while remaining conspicuously silent that he is drawing these principles from Ciceronian rhetoric. Perkins writes of the rhetorical force of preaching, for instance, that “The dignity of the gift of preaching is like that of a lady helped into and carried along in a chariot, while other gifts of speech and learning stand by like maidservants, conscious of her superiority” (3). In the word “dignity” Perkins conflates both power and decorum, and Perkins illustrates the “propriety” of preaching with his “lady,” whom he is loath to call “lady rhetoric.” Following his description of the dignity of preaching, Perkins defines the art as “flexanima, the allurer of the soul” (3), which echoes the last of Cicero’s rhetorical offices: that rhetoric should not only aim to teach (L. *docere*) and delight (L. *delectare*) the audience, but also persuade or move (L. *flectere*) it. Perkins’ *flex* is merely an inflected form of the verb *flectere*, meaning to bend, persuade, prevail upon, or soften. If the proper end of dialectic is to convince by means of logical demonstration, then the proper end of rhetoric is to persuade by whatever means an orator observes in his speaking or writing situation; such probable means include not only
logical appeals, but ethical, emotional, authorial, and circumstantial arguments—arguments that soften the hearer’s soul. Perkins thus achieves in the Preface to his preaching manual an interesting mixture of purposes and means, both dialectical and rhetorical; like Ramus, he achieves a dialectical rhetoric.

The weight and importance Perkins accords to homiletics in his Preface to *The Art of Prophesying* he once more emphasizes in the opening chapter of the manual, which he titles “The Art of Prophesy.” In this chapter, Perkins names the two parts of prophesy that are the minister’s only duties: the first is preaching the Word of God, which makes the minister the *vox dei*; the second is praying to God on behalf of the people, which makes the minister the *vox populi*. Perkins especially stresses that it is the duty of the minister to serve as God’s messenger, and in this capacity he is not unlike God’s angels. God has also granted him the “ministry of reconciliation,” which makes him an ambassador for Christ on earth. Perkins thus views the “art” of prophesy as predominantly rhetorical in nature and urges aspiring ministers to identify themselves as God’s language instruments, serving as intermediaries between men and God or interpreters of God’s Word to men and women who could not otherwise endure God’s immediate Word and presence. In *The Calling of the Ministry*, Perkins writes of the minister’s representative function: “In view of the fact that God’s presence is so glorious and fearful to our nature, we learn how mercifully God has dealt with us, teaching us not by himself, or by his angels from heaven, (which we could never endure) but by men who are like ourselves” (154). To appeal to men, God sends men. What better teacher than one who can at once distinguish himself from and identify with his students. He distinguishes himself as being one of God’s chosen messengers. But like the men to whom he delivers God’s Scriptural message, he is sinful and subject to carnal desires. The minister is at once apart from and a part of his people and it is the paradox of his charge that he secures his authority by alienating himself from his people; for in identifying with
them, he not only makes himself an instrument of God’s mercy, but also subject to his people’s scrutiny. For this reason, Perkins is particularly concerned in *The Art of Prophesying* and *The Calling of the Ministry* with ministers’ sense of rhetorical and social propriety.

Like Augustine, Perkins divides his treatment of the minister’s sense of rhetorical propriety into the exegetical and preaching methods he ought to use, and his treatment of the minister’s sense of social propriety into the perceptions he ought to have of himself and the souls in his charge. The minister’s sense of rhetorical propriety underwrites first his exegetical method. Perkins closes the second chapter of *The Art of Prophesying*, “The Word of God,” with a logical syllogism in which he outlines the “sum and substance” of the Scriptural message, the warrants ministers ought to assume at the outset of exegetical practice. In the major premise Perkins introduces Old Testament prophesy about the life, death, and resurrection of the messiah; in the minor premise he introduces Jesus Christ as having fulfilled the criteria of OT prophesy; the conclusion is that Christ is messiah. Perkins argues that ministers must interpret Scripture as internally consistent and perfect according to this syllogistic line of reasoning and that they must make this Scriptural message of prophesy and fulfillment the exclusive subject of their preaching.

The Bible’s perfection, Perkins continues, “consists either in its sufficiency or its purity. Its sufficiency is such that as the Word of God it is so complete that nothing may be either added to it or taken from it which belongs to its proper purpose” (9). Its proper purpose is “to penetrate into the spirit of man,” “to bind the conscience [and] to constrain it before God either to excuse or accuse us of sin” (10). By itself, Scripture is sufficient to achieve the soul’s conviction and conversion, for “it stands complete in itself, without either deceit or error” (10). And yet the Word was authored by men whose authority subsists in the Holy Spirit, and delivered to men by men who are called by the Holy Spirit into its ministry. Even as Perkins advances the argument
that the Scriptural writers were inspired by the Spirit of God, and that the Word of God “stands complete in itself” in its own perfection, purity, and eternity, he acknowledges the pitfalls inherent in acts of translation and interpretation, for the church is not without its controversies, being comprised by fallen men who are prone to error or deceit. Perkins appeals especially to ministers’ sense of rhetorical propriety in this chapter, pointing out that the Scriptures are “written in a language appropriate for the church” and that ministers must use the canon of Scripture to guard against misinterpretation: “We speak of it as canonical Scripture because it is, as it were, a canon, that is a rule or line used by a master workman, by the aid of which the truth is first discovered and then examined: ‘…and as many as walk according to this rule’ (Gal. 6:16)” (10-11). The church may have its controversies and the men who comprise it may be subject to error, but both church and the congregants who comprise it ought to examine and perhaps right their conduct by the “rule” of Scripture. The canon serves as the line or rule by which men in the church may learn from the Scriptures “which way to walk” and teach it to others.

Perkins continues his argument about the canonicity of the Scriptures from the second to the third chapter, where he divides the contents of the Old and New Testaments in order to demonstrate the proper place and authority of the church in bearing witness to Scriptural truths. Perkins opens the chapter outlining the books of the OT under several topical headings, showing how each one unfolds “the ‘old covenant’ of works” (12). He divides the OT into the historical books which record stories of events that illustrate and confirm the church’s theology, the doctrinal books which prescribe the teachings of the church’s theology, and the prophetic books which contain predictions of God’s judgment of sinners and deliverance of his church. Perkins then divides the NT into histories and letters, showing how these books “plainly expound teaching on the new covenant” (15). The NT histories are the four gospels, and each one contains a slightly different inflection upon the life, deeds, and teachings of Christ from his birth to his
ascension. The NT letters treat the formation of the early church and their attempts to realize Christ’s ministry. Perkins divides the entire canon of Scripture and discusses the place and role of each book to separate them from the apocryphal books included in the Catholic Church’s understanding of the canon. For Perkins and Protestant ministers reading his manual, the Scriptures inform the church’s place as both witness and institution of their teachings. In its understanding of the canon, claims Perkins, the Catholic Church finds Scriptural warrant for the role it plays in deciding matters of church doctrine and governance. Whereas Perkins argues for the primacy of the Scriptures for deciding matters of faith, Catholics argue for the primacy of the Church. As Perkins reminds his readers, “We do not believe something because the church says it is to be believed; rather we believe it because what the church says has first of all been said by Scripture” (19). Perkins affords primacy and authority to the Scriptures in all matters of faith.

Perkins grounds his understanding of the canon on the doctrine *sola fide et sola Scriptura* (L. “by faith and Scripture alone”); that the canon or “rule” of Scripture comes to inform church doctrine and governance places the church second to Scripture. Perkins answers two objections marshaled by the Catholic Church in response to Protestant doctrine largely to lay the theological grounds on which ministers might base their exegetical practice. Perkins terms his answers to these objections “proofs,” which later serve as theological warrants underwriting the exegetical (teaching and preaching) methods he espouses in later chapters of *The Art of Prophesying*. The Catholic Church’s first objection is that the church is the proper recipient of the Scriptures and therefore the appropriate arbiter in determining the meaning of Scriptures as the Word of God. Perkins responds that Catholics advance this argument from mistaken assumptions, from an “irrelevant contrast” between “the manner how” the Scriptures are the Word of God and “the person to whom” the Scriptures are the Word of God (19). Catholics do not dispute that Scripture is the Word of God by itself, testifying to its own truths by “the inward testimony of the Holy
Spirit speaking in the Scriptures,” but rather dispute whether by faith alone the individual can rightly anchor the meaning of the Scriptures. At the crux of this debate is the question of who or what authority can and should “back” the interpretive act that follows from one’s reading of Scripture. For Perkins, authority rests with individual believers: “The way in which we are persuaded is as follows. The elect, having the Spirit of God, first of all discern the voice of Christ speaking in the Scriptures. Furthermore, they approve the voice which they discern; and what they approve they also believe” (18). Perkins brings Scripture and faith together in the Holy Spirit, who sounds His “inward testimony” in the Scriptures and in the hearts of the elect. It is by their faith that the elect become convinced that they hear the Word of God in the Scriptures, for as Perkins succinctly puts it, “faith does not exist apart from the Word” (19). Perkins thus appeals directly to rhetorical propriety when from the doctrine sola fide et sola Scriptura he argues for the proper role the church must play in exercising its judgment in matters of faith:

The sovereign or supreme judgment in matters of faith is the prerogative of the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures. The ministry of judgment (or a ministerial judgment) is given to the church only because she must judge according to the Scriptures. Because she does not always do this, she sometimes fails. (19)

“Ministerial judgment” Perkins bases directly upon the Scriptural canon, upon interpretive acts that take faith and the Scripture informing it as exegetical starting and end points. Scripture testifies to its own truths, and the church testifies to the truths it finds in the Scriptures. The

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66 My emphasis. “Prerogative” determines authority as an exclusive right of an individual or group by virtue of that individual or group’s rank, office, or institution. Perkins claims that “faith does not exist apart from the Word,” for faith “is the prerogative of the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures.” In the word “prerogative” Perkins conflates power (i.e. authority afforded as an exclusive right, privilege, or property), propriety (i.e. social approval backing authority as right or proper), and righteousness (i.e. when authority and the social approval backing it get reified and codified in moral law). In his preaching manual The Art of Prophesying, then, Perkins codifies methods by which ministers might unpack the true, natural, and proper meaning of the Scriptures as the principle author and interpreter of the Scriptures—the Holy Spirit—intended them to be received and understood.
substance and proof of faith, the rightness and righteousness of ministerial judgment, as Perkins understands them, are a question of how closely the proofs accord with the Scriptural “rule” and of how scrupulously ministers “walk the line” of the canon.

Perkins thus closes Chapter 3 arguing that Scriptural canonicity ought to serve as the minister’s doctrinal ordering principle; he devotes the next three chapters to proper biblical exegesis. For Perkins, preaching has two parts: the minister’s preparation of his sermon and his actual preaching of the sermon. Chapter 4 “The Interpretation of Scripture” largely concerns the former, the minister’s preparation of his sermon. When preparing a sermon, Perkins recommends a particular program of study that he claims prepares the minister to interpret the Scriptural message properly. First, writes Perkins, ministers ought to “fix clearly in [their] mind and memory the sum and substance of biblical doctrine” (23). Having already established in Chapter 2 “The Word of God” the “sum and substance” of the Scriptures in the syllogism that Old Testament prophesy anticipates the coming of the messiah on earth, that Jesus Christ fulfills all the criteria of OT prophesy, and that Christ is therefore the messiah, Perkins exhorts ministers to fix this doctrine in their mind and memory as they read the Scriptures.

He also advises ministers to read the Scriptures in a particular order, the order that best frames Christ’s divinity, using all the language arts and resources they have at their disposal: “read the Scriptures in the following order. Using grammatical, rhetorical and logical analysis, and the relevant ancillary studies, read Paul’s Letter to the Romans first of all. After that, the Gospel of John. These are the keys to the New Testament” (24). Once the minister has finished reading the New Testament through Romans and the Gospel of John, Perkins recommends that the minister then read the Old Testament, starting with the doctrinal books—especially the Psalms—and working his way through the prophetical books—especially the Book of Isaiah—to
the historical books. In Chapter 3 “The Contents of Scripture,” Perkins summarizes that it was the aim of Paul’s Letter to the Romans to outline the doctrine of “justification, sanctification, and the duties of the Christian life” and the aim of the Gospel of John to display “the deity of Christ.” Romans and the Gospel of John thus serve as “keys” to the New Testament, for they outline the new dispensation: justification through the saving grace of Christ’s sacrifice; sanctification through the justified person’s grace and faith, by which he or she is moved toward producing a more godly character; and eternal salvation by grace through faith alone. Perkins advises this course of study so that the minister may maintain the doctrinal “rule” or “line” in mind and memory and avoid heretical interpretation.

To ensure the propriety of interpretation, Perkins further recommends several other preparatory exercises, not the least of which is to consult the writings of the early church fathers. New schismatics merely rekindle old heresies so that ministers need not find novel ways of rejecting and refuting these heresies; the church fathers’ refutations are “well-tested and still reliable” (24). Finally, Perkins advises ministers to catalogue important and very often difficult doctrinal points in commonplace books not only to create a storehouse of new and old material for writing sermons, but also to isolate darker passages needing more consideration so that the minister might open them through prayer and reflection. By keeping commonplace books, ministers have a record of their understanding, thereby clarifying doctrine and avoiding heretical interpretation. Once more using Ramus to arrange his own material, Perkins subdivides the minister’s preparation for preaching into interpretation and division (i.e. what Ramus would call invention and disposition) and stresses rhetorical propriety in both parts: interpretation being “the opening up of the words and statements of Scripture in order to bring out its single, full and natural sense” (26) and “appropriate division of [the meaning of both the passage and its presentation] for orderly exposition” (25). Perkins closes Chapter 4 “Interpretation of Scripture”
and devotes the longest chapter of his preaching manual, Chapter 5 “Principles for Expounding Scripture,” to introducing and discussing appropriate methods for Scriptural exposition. Chapter 6 “Rightly Handling the Word of God” Perkins devotes exclusively to the “appropriate division” of Scripture to achieve clear, well-arranged, and properly doctrinal exposition.

Perkins’ “Rule” of Faith in (Ad)ministering the Word:

Letting the Scriptures Speak for Themselves

Perkins opens his treatment of right interpretation refuting the Catholic Church’s fourfold method for reading Scripture, claiming that “Scripture has only one sense, the literal one” (26). The other three interpretive levels composing the fourfold method Perkins claims are distinctions without a difference: “An allegory is only a different way of expressing the same meaning” as the literal sense, and “anagogy and tropology are ways of applying the sense of the passage” (26). Protestant preachers interpret, exposit, and apply the sense of Scripture, but unlike the Catholic homilist, they tie their interpretive acts to a single, literal sense. However, Perkins does introduce what he calls “subordinate means” to aid the interpretive act: the analogy of faith, the circumstances of the passage, and the comparison of different passages. Each method serves to open and clarify the message of Scripture to the individual who gleans from the passage’s “literal” sense both what the text states or reports directly and the doctrine it conveys—the passage’s doctrinal points being what the Patristic writers came to call its “allegorical” sense. In the passage’s “use” or “application,” to which he devotes two full chapters of his sermon manual, Perkins finds the Scriptures’ moral significance for the individual believer and eschatological
significance for the spiritual community—what Catholic exegetes and homilists came to understand as the Scriptures’ “tropological” and “anagogical” senses, respectively.

Perkins introduces the “analogy of faith” as the first means ministers might use to interpret the literal sense of Scripture, which he defines as “a summary of the Scriptures, drawn from its well-known and clear parts” (26-27). He subdivides this definition into the two elements constituting the analogy of faith: the first is faith as the Apostle’s Creed presents it, and the second is charity or love as handled in the Ten Commandments. Following Augustine here, Perkins advances faith, charity, and love as the “rule” or “canon” of faith, which once more can be traced to Paul’s admonition in Romans—the very book Perkins claims ministers ought to read first in their course of study in preparation to preach the proper message of the Scriptures. As Paul writes in Romans 12:6, “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophecy according to the proportion of faith” (King James Version). Though Paul lists several other gifts accorded the visible church, it is prophecy that he lists first among them, and prophesying that he cautions preachers to practice “according to the proportion of faith.” Perkins’ treatment of the “rule” of faith is reminiscent of Augustine’s logic of proportions for biblical exegesis and presentation, that the degree of faith, hope, charity, and love readers of Scripture have by the grace of God is directly proportional to the degree of understanding they reach in their reading of the Scriptures and the degree to which they can open the Scriptures to the understanding of others.

Coupled with the analogy or rule of faith are the two other “subordinate means” Perkins recommends ministers apply to achieve understanding in their readings of Scripture. Both assume the logic of spiritual proportions, but are more “rhetorical” in their approach to exegetical

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67 See Chapter 1 “Rhetorical Propriety in Augustine’s On Christian Doctrine” for a fuller treatment of how Augustine’s logic of proportions came to inform his theology.
propriety than the analogy of faith. The first is the “circumstances” of the passage, whereby the minister “dramatizes” the passage and reconstructs its rhetorical or communicative situation. Perkins lists the following questions the minister might use to analyze the passage: “Who is speaking? To whom? On what occasion? At what time? In what place? For what end? What goes before? What follows?” (27). By contextualizing the passage in this way, the minister clarifies the intent of the speaker and the purpose of the passage, but once more according to the rule of faith. The second means Perkins recommends is “a comparison of different passages,” whereby the minister reads the darker passages of Scripture against clearer passages in order to illuminate them. There are two methods by which the minister might make such comparisons. The first entails comparing a statement in one part of Scripture with a statement in another part. The second entails comparing the contexts in which these statements occur. Part of the exegete’s task, not unlike that of the literary analyst, is to note repetitions, omissions, and substitutions in the work and explain their significance. Perkins advises exegetes not only to note repetitive statements in Scripture, but also to explain their variations and alterations, citing several reasons for doing so. One is exegetical: the minister uses clearer passages to illuminate darker passages. Another is diacritical: the minister uses various passages to distinguish places, times, and persons referenced in the text. A third is delimiting: the minister aligns the sense of the passage with the original intention and meaning of the Holy Spirit. A fourth is practical: the minister applies the general sense of Scripture to its fulfillment in the specific or the specific to its fulfillment in the general. The last is elliptical: the minister refers to shorter passages with the same sense for sake of brevity, clarity, and propriety, noting that later writers omit much from their references to earlier writers “because the words are not appropriate to the matter at hand” (28).

68 I use “dramatize” here because the line of questioning Perkins recommends reminds modern readers of the critical technique “Dramatism” that Kenneth Burke developed in A Grammar of Motives.
Perkins suggests that ministers might use the same economy in their own speech and writing. Comparison of repetitive statements aside, Perkins briefly treats comparison of one Scriptural context with another, which he understands as “phraseology” and “sense.” Repetitive passages will either agree or disagree with each other in their manner of speech or in their meaning. To clarify their phrasing, Perkins advises ministers to use Greek and Hebrew concordances, so that they might find repetitions in the text, compare them, and note how much they depart from the original languages. Augustine included a similar suggestion in his own preaching manual *On Christian Doctrine* to check the stylistic propriety of Scriptural translation. To clarify the passages’ sense, Perkins advises ministers to compare general rhetorical moves in Scripture to other passages in which the writer makes a similar rhetorical move, for it is by these passages’ comparison that they will be understood.

Perkins carries his treatment of exegetical propriety into the longest chapter of his manual, Chapter 5 “Principles for Expounding Scripture.” In preparation to treat the *ethos* and *pathos* of preaching, Chapter 5 presents a detailed analysis of *logos*, and it is in Chapter 5 that Perkins demonstrates to ministers how to properly read the “rhetoric” of the Scriptures.\(^69\) Perkins opens the chapter dividing and classifying the “nature of the [Scriptural] passage being handled”

\(^69\) In Chapter 5 “Principles for Expounding Scripture,” Perkins offers ministers guidelines for interpreting figurative language. Whereas Augustine, acknowledging the province of the grammarian, understands figures of speech and thought first as species of grammar and then as species of rhetoric, Perkins, following Ramus’ re-classification, understands them more simply as species of rhetoric. Augustine thus concerns himself with stylistic propriety; Perkins with rhetorical propriety. Ramus writes in *Arguments in Rhetoric against Quintillian* that “[g]rammar governs the rules of appropriate words, rhetoric the rules of modified words” (131). By “modified words” Ramus means figurative language. Opposed to classical writers (and medieval writers like Augustine) who located tropic language within the field of grammar, Ramus defines the trope as a species of style, and style he understands as the first of rhetoric’s two functions: elocution. Modified or embellished words are for Ramus the very substance of rhetoric, which is precisely what inclined Puritans, given their predilection for plain language, to embrace Ramist dialectic and maintain a healthy distrust of rhetoric in their preaching arts.
as either “analogical and plain” or “cryptic and dark” (30). 70 “Analogical places” in Scripture are those passages “whose apparent meaning is consistent with the analogy of faith. Here this rule is to be followed: If the natural meaning of the words agrees with the circumstances of the passage, then the natural meaning is the proper meaning” (30). In his appeal to exegetical propriety and plain sense, Perkins assumes at least two forms of propriety: stylistic and rhetorical. First, Perkins assumes the “natural” meaning of the words, that is, definitions solidified by conventional usage. Second, Perkins accounts for how the syntactical situation of the words shapes their sense, saying that ministers must read them in their proper context so that they are made to agree with the circumstances of the Scriptural passage. Finally, Perkins conflates “natural meaning” with “proper meaning” according to the analogy of faith. “Cryptic or hidden passages,” on the other hand, “are those which are difficult and obscure.” For expounding the darker places in Scripture, Perkins recommends the following rule and guide: “If the natural meaning of the words obviously disagrees with either the analogy of faith or very clear parts of Scripture, then another meaning, one which agrees with both similar and different places, with the circumstances and words of the passage, and with the nature of what is being discussed, must be the right one” (30-31). Finding these “other meanings” means that Perkins must treat, albeit briefly, words in their “modified” senses.

To illustrate the doctrinal implications and importance of reading “cryptic” passages properly, Perkins cites Christ’s words from the last supper, “This is My body which is broken for you” (I Cor. 11:24). To read the passage literally, interpreting the words by their natural meanings, becomes the Scriptural warrant for the Roman Catholic mass, that the bread in

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70 Interesting that Perkins defines “plain” language as diction which bears a clear and direct relationship (i.e. diction which serves as analogue) to the faith. Doing so implies that metaphorical diction (i.e. what Ramus calls “modified words”) obscures or darkens the Scriptural sense, and that exegeses should only explicate a passage as metaphorical when the natural meaning of its words disagrees with the teachings of the faith.
communion is the actual body of Christ; or in the Lutheran view, that Christ’s body is somehow in, under, or with the bread in communion. But, as Perkins points out, the literal reading disagrees with a fundamental article of faith: that Christ’s body “ascended into heaven,” and that the sacrament serves as “a memorial of the absent body of Christ” (31). Another interpretation of this passage must therefore be sought out in the context of the passage, compared to other passages, and tested against the analogy of faith. The true meaning of this passage is properly understood not from the words’ natural meaning, but from their modified meaning. The passage can only be considered an analogue of the faith if the exegete reads “body” according to the logic of metonymy. Perkins stresses the propriety of this reading, citing several reasons:

First of all, it agrees with the analogy of faith in two ways:

1. “[Christ] ascended into heaven”; he was taken up locally and visibly from the earth into heaven. Consequently, his body is not to be received with the mouth at the communion, but by faith apprehending it in heaven.

2. He was “born of the virgin Mary”; Christ had a true and natural body which was long, broad, thick, and seated and circumscribed in one particular place. If this is so, the bread in the Supper cannot be his actual body but must be only a sign or pledge of it.

Secondly, this interpretation is consistent with the circumstances described in the passage (1 Cor. 11:23-26). [Perkins here demonstrates by a close reading of the passage that “the bread is not properly the body, but is so symbolically or as a sign” (32).]
Thirdly, this interpretation is consistent with the nature of a sacrament, in which there must be an *appropriate* relationship and similarity between the sign and the thing signified. But that is impossible if the bread is literally the body. (31-32)

Coupled with repetition and omission, Perkins here accounts for the last of the analyst’s “look-fors” when he explains that figurative language is a form of “substitution.” After citing Augustine several times in the pages that follow to introduce “[v]arious conditions and caveats [that] should be observed…in harmonizing biblical passages” (41), Perkins closes his treatment of figurative language with a recapitulation of his appeal to rhetorical propriety: “When the natural sense of a passage can be determined with the help of these principles, the meaning which is most appropriate to the context should be assumed for any word which is open to a range of meaning” (46). And he closes Chapter 5 “Principles for Expounding Scripture” with a note on the stylistic propriety, claiming that the correct reading of English Bibles’ marginal references to Greek or Hebrew words is the one that “(i) agrees with the grammatical construction, and with other reliable manuscripts. (ii) makes sense of the context and thrust of the passage and agrees with the analogy of faith” (47). In this advice too Perkins can be said to follow Augustine.

Chapter 6 “Rightly Handling the Word of God” marks Perkins’ transition from invention to disposition, from biblical exegesis to its presentation, and the chapters that follow begin to account for the audience of the minister’s preaching. Perkins’ concern with rhetorical propriety is

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71 My emphasis. Coupled with several other places in this chapter (and elsewhere in *The Art of Prophesying* and *The Calling of the Ministry*) that I don’t cite, I emphasize Perkins’ appeal to propriety as exegetical and presentational crux of the homiletical arts. For instance, in Chapter 5 “Principles for Expounding Scripture,” Perkins writes that “On occasion it is *appropriate* to supply words which are lacking in the text where this is consistent with the analogy of faith and with the circumstances and words of the context” (33); that sacramental language is “more *properly* [understood as] sacramental metonymy” (34); that “the grammatical and rhetorical *properties* of words indicate their different nuances of meaning” (39); and that “in addition to giving literary and aesthetic pleasure [figures of speech and thought] also serve to nourish faith” (40). Perkins not only defines for ministers studying his manual such figures as anthropomorphism, synecdoche, metaphor, ellipses, pleonasm, and irony—to name a few—he also recommends their use to amplify, clarify, or render more appropriate the Scriptural message.
readily apparent in his titling of this chapter, and it is in this chapter that he comes “to consider
the right ‘cutting’, or ‘dividing’ of [the Scriptures]” (48). At the risk of mixing his metaphors at
the opening of the chapter, Perkins illustrates the importance of the minister’s properly dividing
his treatment of Scripture by finding an analogue in the Levites’ practice of preparing animals for
sacrifice. He writes, “The idea of cutting here is metaphorical language possibly derived from the
activity of the Levites, who were required to cut the limbs of the animals they sacrificed with
great care” (48). Perkins divides the practice of disposition into two constituent acts: 1. resolution
or partition, and 2. use or application. He treats resolution completely in Chapter 6 and reserves
its use or application for Chapters 7 and 8. The resolution or partition of the text Perkins urges the
minister to regard as its “cutting” or “dividing,” for he argues that the minister must practice
equal care extracting proper doctrine from the text as he does when he divides and arranges it for
presentation.

Coupled with his metaphor of the Levites’ practice of preparing animals for sacrifice,
Perkins also finds an analogue in the “untwisting and loosening of the weaver’s web” (48). Both
metaphors at once illustrate the complexity of the minister’s task and the skill and care with
which he must set about it. Like a Levite preparing an animal for sacrifice, the minister must
appropriately analyze the Scriptures (i.e. rightly “cut” the whole into parts) and rightly handle the
passages (i.e. the parts he cut away from the whole) as offerings up to God. In his metaphor,
Perkins renders the practice of disposition “ritualistic,” showing how after interpreting the
Scriptural passage, the minister must take pains to extract the passage’s significance according to
a particular—indeed prescribed—method: first, draw out the passage’s doctrine or teachings;
then, offer reasons for this reading of the passage; finally, show how the doctrine applies to the
people in the congregation, how they might use it in their own lives. This method of “doctrine,
reasons, and uses” comes to represent a distinctly Puritan method of preaching, the intricacy of
which Perkins likens to unraveling the weaver’s web because the minister must know “that doctrines ought to be deduced from passages only when it is proper and valid to do so” (51).\footnote{My emphasis. Knowing when it is proper and valid to deduce doctrine from “implications” in Scripture really forces ministers to confront the propriety of their practice. That their practice is rhetorical renders the problem one of rhetorical propriety, which only becomes apparent when one examines the problem as rhetorical: The analogy of faith suggests that faith alone should serve as the test of whether the Scriptures have been properly interpreted, understood, and disposed so that their message might be understood by the congregation. Nevertheless, the intricate rhetorical problem the minister must address is not only his own faith—a question of ethos—but also the faith of each member of his audience. The minister may be presenting his “right” handling of the Scriptures to an audience mixed of regenerate and unregenerate congregants alike, the latter group being unready to receive the Word and are therefore recalcitrant to the minister’s message. The analogy of faith ensures the proper meaning of the text and perhaps the ethos of the minister, but what of the audience’s reception? Early in her book bearing the same title as Perkins’ own, The Art of Prophesying: New England Sermons and the Shaping of Belief, Teresa Toulouse describes the minister’s practice of opening the Scriptures to his congregation as “subject to the same difficulties as the ‘text’ [he] proposed to interpret” (3). Like the Scriptures themselves, the minister’s sermon was aimed at elect and reprobate alike, and with an audience comprised of congregants differing in their degree of faith, the minister had to shape his sermon to meet the knowledge and needs of his audience. Toulouse describes as a kind of “double vision” ministers’ conceptions of their audience according to the analogy of faith, for it was by their ideas of what properly constitutes faith that they came to favor one method of presentation to another and thus privilege one image of their audience to another. Toulouse claims that ministers met the contingencies of their rhetorical situation—the “double vision” they had to adopt as sermon writers—by leaning either toward Spirit or law, faith or works, piety or morality, or, in Calvin’s terms, toward either justification or sanctification, depending on their hearers’ spiritual conditions and needs. In the process, these sermon writers not only reveal the image they have of their audience in their sermons, but “they also uncover their attitudes about the relation of personal belief to the standards of the community” (9). In Perkins’ own sermon model, Toulouse discovers this same tendency toward “double vision”:

Perkins’ Arte thus balances between views of Scripture’s presentation that could, in practice, become contradictory. On the one hand, Perkins wishes to emphasize the role of the Spirit in the effectual hearing and preaching of the Word. On the other hand, he is concerned with listeners other than the professedly elect and thus with questions about how the preacher should “divide” the Word, interpret his divisions, and finally address them (in a particular persuasive form) to his listeners. In sum, if Perkins acknowledges the sole power of the Spirit to infuse spiritual knowledge within an already justified soul, he also recognizes the practical, pastoral responsibilities of the preacher to an entire community of listeners. (16)

Toulouse finds contradiction in the very title of Perkins’ sermon manual, for “How can ‘prophesying,’ the inspired act of speaking forth the Spirit, be yoked to an ‘art,’ a contrived structure which, in the case of preaching, seems consciously directed towards teaching and persuading an audience?” (1). It is precisely in this contradiction that Toulouse sees preachers’ leaning in their sermon message either toward inspiration, urging their congregants to embrace individual influxes of the Holy Spirit, which, taken to its logical conclusion, opens up the possibility of Antinomianism, or toward moral law, exhorting their congregants to consider their moral and ethical responsibility to their community, which suggests “preparationism” or salvation by works and not just by faith alone. Toulouse concludes that contrary to the “spiritism” he espouses in his manual, Perkins’ own ministerial and preaching model leans toward “preparationism,” especially in his emphasis upon the sermon’s “uses” or “application” rather than upon its “doctrine” and “reasons.” Though she does not anywhere use the word “propriety” in her book, rhetorical propriety does indeed underwrite her analysis of select New England sermons to glean these sermon writers’ differing conceptions of their audience. By asking how the sermon style suits its audience, Toulouse explores rhetorical propriety in one facet of the rhetorical situation.}
The minister always risks drawing improper doctrine from the Scriptures, and indeed heresies are often proved by reference to the Scriptures. Perkins once more shows that the *proper* test of Scriptural disposition, just like Scriptural exegesis, is the analogy of faith. The proportion of the minister’s faith in the Scriptures as the Word of God ensures the purity of his interpretation and disposition of the Scriptures, and though the minister might illustrate the proper meaning of the Scriptures by analogy or allegory, as Perkins himself does in this chapter, Perkins only legitimizes the practice with the caveat that Scripture is always and everywhere its own authority.

Scripture’s “illustration” is the substance of Perkins’ treatment of the “uses” or “applications” of Scripture. Having already considered the message and partition of the Scriptures, whereby he introduced the first two steps of his preaching method—extracting doctrine and offering reasons for the interpretive act by which the minister arrives at doctrine, Perkins introduces “use and application” as “the skill by which the doctrine which has been properly drawn from Scripture is handled in ways which are appropriate to the circumstances of the place and time and to the people in the congregation” (54). One notes that Perkins is still concerned in this passage with the “right handling” of the Word of God. One also notes the transition Perkins makes in this passage from exegetical propriety—“doctrine which has been properly drawn from Scripture”—to the propriety of its presentation—that “Scripture is handled in ways which are appropriate to the circumstances of the place and time and to the people in the congregation.”

Both concerns are species of rhetorical propriety.

Rhetorical propriety governs each facet of the rhetorical triangle: author/speaker, text/speech, reader/audience, and the writing context or speaking situation (i.e. the timing, place, and circumstances in which the text/speech is read or delivered). Preaching is a particularly

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73 My emphasis.
complex rhetorical practice in that it comprises an exegetical act (i.e. reading and writing) as well as a speech act. Perkins makes it a point of his chapters on “rightly handling” the Word of God to connect the propriety of reading and interpreting (i.e. writing about) the Scriptures to speaking to others at various times and in various places about the Scriptures. Perkins devotes much of Chapter 7 “Use and Application” to audience analysis, dividing the minister’s mixed congregation into the seven spiritual conditions he will likely encounter and advising which mixture of law and gospel is appropriate to each. For Perkins, the “basic principle” in expounding upon the uses of Scripture is “to know whether the passage is a statement of the law or of the gospel” (54). The law’s use is to expose the congregant’s sin so that he might become convicted of his sin and the need for perfect righteousness. The law must therefore come first in the order of teaching. The gospel’s use, on the other hand, is to teach what is to be done so that the congregant might become comforted by his redemption in Christ. The gospel qualifies the law and so must follow it in the order of teaching.

Perkins reiterates in The Calling of the Ministry that readers of Scripture learn from Chapters 32 and 33 of The Book of Job that “it is the proper office of a minister ‘to declare unto man his righteousness’” (102), and that “the true way to teach and declare righteousness” is by preaching both the law and the gospel. “But,” Perkins stresses, “they must be preached in their proper order, first the law to bring repentance and then the gospel to work faith and forgiveness—never the other way around” (105). Like The Art of Prophesying, everywhere apparent in Perkins’ companion piece The Calling of the Ministry is his concern with how rhetorical propriety—how the proper time, place, agent, manner, instrument, application, and audience of preaching—underwrites not just the efficacy of the preaching, but the preacher’s office as messenger of God:

The minister of the gospel is also an interpreter. He is someone who is able to deliver the reconciliation made between God and man. I do not mean that he is the author of
reconciliation; that is the Godhead alone. Nor is he the effecter of this reconciliation; that is the second person, Christ Jesus. Nor is he the assurer or ratifier of it; that is the good news of the gospel. But he is the interpreter of it.

First of all he is someone who can expound and explain the covenant of grace, and rightly lay down how this reconciliation is accomplished. Secondly, he is some who can properly and accurately apply the means for its outworking. Thirdly, he is someone who has authority to proclaim and declare it when it is effected. In these three ways he is God’s interpreter to the people. (88)

In outlining the minister’s three offices with the modifiers “rightly,” “properly,” and “accurately,” Perkins emphasizes that clarity and propriety are the minister’s two chief excellences of language use when preaching the Scriptures to his people. In his Rhetoric, Aristotle also offers clarity and propriety as his two chief excellences of language:

To make a further requirement of style that it should be pleasant and elevated is superfluous. For why that, rather than chaste or liberal or any other virtue of character? The things discussed will make the style pleasant if the virtue of lexis has been rightly defined. For otherwise, what is the point of being clear and not flat, but appropriate? For if it is luxuriant, it is not clear, nor if it is concise. But it is clear that the mean is suitable. And the things mentioned will make style pleasant, if they are well mingled: the conventional and the strange, and rhythm, and persuasiveness from propriety. (1414a6)

Aristotle offers “mixed” style to suit a “mixed” audience; however, the mixed style presupposes an adept orator, skilled in both the plain and grand styles, as well as gifted with and instructed in a strong sense of rhetorical propriety that he might read his hearers’ needs rightly and tailor his speech to meet those needs.
Perkins’ categorizes seven types of hearers and the measure of law and gospel that ministers should use to suit and correct their hearers’ spiritual condition. First among the lot are unbelievers who are both “ignorant and unteachable.” Ministers must prepare these hearers by first reasoning with them so that they become “aware of their attitude and disposition” and then by reproving their sin so that “their consciences may be aroused and touched with fear and they may become teachable” (56). Once the minister has secured this group’s attention, Perkins advises delivering to them the message of the Scriptures. If the minister meets with little response, then he ought to explain the message more comprehensively and in greater detail. If still the message falls on deaf ears, then this group must be considered irrevocably unteachable and unregenerate, and as such abandoned. Perkins here accounts for the “hostile” audience.

Second among the group of unbelievers are those who are teachable, but ignorant of God’s Word. This group of hearers should be instructed through catechism. Perkins recommends catechism because of its plain method of question and answer in teaching the basic principles of the Christian faith. He notes that it is important for ministers to recognize the difference between “milk” and “meat,” both of which “nourish” hearers with the same spiritual truths, but arrive at them by a different manner and style. “Milk,” says Perkins, “is a brief, plain and general explanation of the principles of the faith” (57). Milk is to be set before “spiritual babes”—those who are “immature” or “weak” in the faith. “Strong meat,” on the other hand, Perkins describes as “a detailed, full, illuminating and clear handling of the doctrine of faith. It includes careful and lucid exposition of biblical teaching” (57). Strong meat is to be set before those who are better instructed—those who are more mature in the faith. The plainness and simplicity of catechism makes it “milk”—appropriate spiritual nourishment—to this second group who are teachable, but ignorant. Perkins here addresses the first of many “wavering” audiences.
The third and fourth groups of hearers are comprised of those who have knowledge, but who have never been humbled or who have been only partly humbled. Those who have never been humbled need to be moved toward repentance. To arouse these feelings in the audience, Perkins writes that “it is appropriate to use some choice section of the law, which may reprove any obvious sin” (58). Only when these hearers begin to show signs of genuine sorrow are they to be comforted with the gospel. For those who have been humbled, but superficially, the minister ought to “[c]xplain the law to them carefully tempered with the gospel,” so that they become convicted of their sins and yet find comfort in the gospel.

With the fifth group of hearers Perkins opens his treatment of how to rightly handle believers, which is, in short, that believers must be taught the gospel first and then the law. But when teaching the gospel to believers, ministers must emphasize the doctrines of justification, sanctification, and perseverance; and when teaching the law, which now follows the gospel, ministers must restrict themselves to the law “as it applies to those who are no longer under its curse,” so that the remnants of sin may be destroyed and “to induce a proper sense of fear of doing wrong” in the believer (59-60).

In the sixth group of hearers Perkins addresses believers who have “fallen back,” either fallen back into sin from a state of grace or partly departed from the faith. A reversion to a sinful lifestyle Perkins views as a failure in knowledge, which must be met with the ministry of the law to arouse the appropriate legal sorrow. Temporary departure from the faith Perkins views as a failure “either in the knowledge of the gospel or in apprehending Christ” (60). Both can lead to despair. Perkins cautions ministers that the “appropriate” time and place to diagnose their congregants’ declinations from states of grace are in voluntary private confession, whereby the congregant enters into confession willingly and without compulsion, confesses merely those sins
which are eating away at his conscience and threatening him with spiritual danger, and makes his
confession to the pastor alone, but with the understanding that his confession “may be
confidentially shared with other reliable men in the church” (61). Once the minister diagnoses the
problem, he may prescribe the proper remedy from the gospel to encourage the doubtful that
“[e]very new act of sin requires a new act of faith and repentance” (62).

The seventh and last group Perkins treats is really nothing more than the mixture of the
previous six groups, for the typical (and actual) situation for which ministers must ready
themselves is preaching to congregations comprised of both believers and unbelievers. 74 Key to
the minister’s success in any parish is his ability to properly diagnose the spiritual needs of his
congregation, move them in both mind and emotion with the fitting doctrine, duly measured with
law and gospel, and observe biblical circumscriptions when prescribing Scriptural remedies to
suit his congregants’ spiritual conditions. Not only does Perkins here account in his audience
analysis for the various means ministers might use to tailor their instruction to suit both audience
and occasion, he also recommends the manner or style in which ministers might realize these
means in their preaching. Whenever possible, says Perkins, the minister must teach, preach, and
counsel his congregation “in a mild and gentle spirit” (65). By these means and in this manner,
the minister achieves the end of his preaching, which is to enable his hearers “to live well in the
context of the family, the state, and the church” (65). Rhetorical propriety (i.e. the means and
manner of preaching) thus secures social propriety (i.e. the end of preaching).

In the final few chapters of The Art of Prophesying, Perkins treats preaching method.
Transitioning from the “means” and “manner” of his previous chapters, Perkins opens with a
discussion of preaching style. He divides the practice of preaching into two essential elements the

74 Perkins thus accounts for the “mixed” audience whose members’ spiritual conditions ministers must
address in a style that is “mixed” between preaching and teaching.
preacher must always consider in his preaching: “(i) the hiding of human wisdom, and (ii) the demonstration or manifestation of the spirit” (71). That Perkins titles his preaching manual the “art” of prophesying is significant here, for by doing so he accounts for contrived nature of preaching, only to argue that the preacher must make an effort to “conceal” these contrivances everywhere in his art—“both in the content of the sermon and in the language [he] use[s]” (71). Like Augustine, Perkins argues that the preacher must be a skilled rhetorician and learned in the language arts and philosophy; the preacher “may, and in fact must . . . employ a wide variety of reading while he is preparing his sermon” (71). The sermon’s purpose, however, is not to demonstrate the preacher’s oratorical skill or knowledge of the arts. Its purpose is rather to serve as testimony to the Word of God and profess the knowledge of Christ to the congregation. Part of the preacher’s task is therefore to hide his skills as interpreter and orator from his congregation, to bury his exegetical wisdom and redirect his congregation’s attention away from the rhetorical effects he has designed his sermon to achieve toward the Scriptural message he has opened in his sermon. Both the form his sermon takes and its message result from his artistry, and yet, as Perkins claims, the best preachers conceal their artistry in a kind of “Christian sprezzatura,” which is closer in meaning to “artlessness” than to “studied nonchalance.”

Even though Perkins trades upon the classical definition of sprezzatura, even quoting the Latin proverb “Artis etiam celare artem” (L. that “it is also a point of art to conceal the art”) to make his case, Perkins means something very different from sprezzatura in its classical sense. Ancient, medieval, and even early modern practice of sprezzatura, in its classical sense, called for the “effortless” public exhibition of an art in order to reveal the truly expert craftsman. Ironically, as the performance demonstrated less artistry, the audience focused more on the performer’s mastery of his art. Perkins realigns his readers’ understanding of “artlessness” from a classical to a Christian sense, removing the audience’s focus upon artist-performer’s mastery of his art and
placing it instead upon the simultaneous origin and end of his art: “the demonstration or manifestation of the Spirit.” For Perkins, “The ‘demonstration of the Spirit’ (1 Cor. 2:4) becomes a reality when, in preaching, the minister of the Word conducts himself in such a way that everyone—even those who are ignorant of the gospel and are unbelievers—recognize that it is not so much the preacher who is speaking, but the Spirit of God in him and by him” (71-72). Just as Perkins trades on the classical rhetorical term “sprezzatura” to reach this point in his exposition of the preacher’s “art,” here he appears to trade on the classical poetical practice of “invoking the muse” for poetic inspiration (L. inspirare, to breathe into). Just as the muse speaks through the classical poet, the Holy Spirit speaks through the preacher who brings the Scriptures to life through his living and powerful ministry of the Word of God. The classical-to-Christian rhetoric Perkins sets up in his treatment of the preaching arts has interesting consequences for rhetorical propriety at several places (or rather moments) in the rhetorical situation.75

The first moment is “ethical.” Shortly after considering which way the preacher should walk in his preaching, Perkins cautions the novice ministers reading his book not only to “preach well,” but also to “live well.” His advice is reminiscent of Quintilian’s definition of the “ideal orator” as “the good man who speaks well.” Perkins instead draws upon the language of Scripture and the descriptions of the church fathers to define the good preacher. He writes,

God abhors godly speech which is not joined with a godly life (Psa. 50:16-17).

As Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329-c.389) said, it is as strange to see someone who is supposed to guide others on the way wandering out of the way himself, as it is to see a physician with signs of disease in his own body. (73)

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75 It is perhaps clearer to think of these “places” as “moments,” especially if we are to consider the sermon as first an oratorical performance and thereafter as a textual performance. Oratory suggests live performance.
Like Augustine, Perkins at once illustrates through metaphors of walking and wandering, and of bodily health and infirmity (metaphors he, of course, borrows from Scripture and the early church fathers) that the efficacy of the preacher-as-orator’s speech is contingent upon the rightness and righteousness of the preacher-as-man’s conduct. The classical debate over whether wicked men might also be orators, which becomes most pointed in Quintilian’s *Institutes of Oratory*, becomes even more pointed in Christian rhetoric. The “strangeness” that Perkins cites Gregory of Nazianzus as having written about the preacher’s art he cites mainly to demonstrate the *impropriety* inherent in any conflict between the preacher’s words and actions. Preachers’ thoughts, words, and deeds ought to be aligned, for any misalignment ends, quite literally, in a contradiction.

Actions “signify” all the more for speakers who exhort their audiences to align their thoughts, words, and actions with the message of the Scriptures. Perkins cites another early church father to support his point:

John of Chrysostom [Gr. “golden-tongued”] (347-407), commenting on Matthew 20, says: ‘The doctor of the church by teaching well and by living well instructs the people how they ought to live well; but by living ill he instructs God how to condemn him.’ And again: ‘It is an easy matter to show wisdom in words; teach me to live by your life, this is the best teaching.’ Words do not make as great an impression on the soul as works do! (73)

Perkins’ citation once again suggests the metaphors of bodily health and infirmity in living well and ill. His citation also introduces an interesting theological position on the importance of works in the soul’s salvation. In this and other passages in his sermon manual, commentators such as Teresa Toulouse argue that Perkins’ appeals to the importance of the preacher’s *ethos* suggests a
kind of “preparationism” creeping into his practical theology. And yet, just as Perkins at once advises ministers learning the art of preaching to practice “concealing” their wisdom in a kind of “Christian sprezzatura” in order to make the “manifestation or demonstration of the Spirit” a reality, so too does he advise ministers reading this chapter on the preaching arts to live well that they may speak well. Whether or not the Spirit readies the minister’s soul for right living that he may speak well is the subject of Perkins’ *The Calling of the Ministry*. His suggestion in *The Art of Prophesying* that the minister must conceal his preaching “art” to better demonstrate an influx of the spirit may be theologically questionable, but it is certainly rhetorically significant.

Perkins’ appeal to the *ethos* of the minister, by its very position in the rhetorical situation, takes us from the “ethical” moment to the “aesthetic” and “emotional” moment. Directly following Perkins’ introduction of the two “essential” parts of good preaching practice, he in fact demonstrates that the preacher’s hiding of his art leads to a more powerful manifestation of the Spirit from the audience’s perspective. The preacher’s congregation, including “even those who are ignorant of the gospel and are unbelievers” (71), recognizes the presence of the Holy Spirit *in* the preacher’s art, not *by* the preacher’s art. The latter suggests that the audience perceives the language the preacher uses as an “instrument,” a “tool” he manipulates to persuade his hearers. Even when the preacher attempts to conceal his artistic use of language, the audience recognizes the skill of the preacher, not the power of his message. Dovetailing his treatment of the essential stylistic elements of good preaching with the place of moral and ethical conduct in good preaching, Perkins slowly shifts his focus from the preacher to his congregation, from the orator to his audience. For instance, Perkins follows his advice that the preacher ought to live a “godly life” if he is to use “godly speech” with another kind of concealment the preacher might practice to make his preaching more effective. This time, however, he advises preachers to conceal their sinfulness along with their artistry:
It is one of the secrets of ministry [writes Perkins] that the minister ought to cover his infirmities, so that they are not obvious. Ordinary people do not distinguish between the ministry and the minister. They are not able to see the importance of the ministry without first assessing the person of the minister. (73)

That the office becomes indistinguishable from the person who fills it, from the point of view of the audience, renders Perkins’ slide from *ethos* to *pathos*, from the person of the minister to the perception of those who listen to him, a question of rhetorical propriety.

Perkins’ own language is everywhere marked with appeals to rhetorical propriety, by which person, presentation style, and rhetorical effects become aligned. He focuses first on *logos*, saying that the preacher’s “text” or “speech” “must be spiritual and gracious…both simple and clear, tailored to the understanding of the hearers and appropriate for expressing the majesty of the Spirit” (72). From “opening” Scripture in diction and by anecdote, Perkins then slides into focus the person of the minister, whose efficacy in preaching is directly contingent upon the way he lives his life. In short, his preaching style cannot be separated from his lifestyle:

Gracious speech [Perkins continues] expresses the grace of the heart (*Luke* 4:22; *John* 7:46). Such grace is either of the person, or of the ministry.

The grace of the person is the holiness of the heart and of an unblameable life. While these do not in themselves qualify anyone to be a minister, no-one can do the work of the ministry without them. (72)

Just as Perkins here shifts from outward style (i.e. “gracious speech”) to inward preparation (i.e. “the grace of the heart”), he again shifts from the preacher’s external rhetorical effects to his internal readiness to achieve these effects. In preparing to preach, argues Perkins, the minister
must ready his mind and internalize the inward sense of the doctrine he aims to preach: “whatever responses a particular sermon requires should first be stirred up privately in our own minds, so that we can kindle the same flame in our hearers” (74). As within, so without—suggests Perkins—so that by aligning gracious speech with the grace of his heart and foreseeing in his mind’s eye his evocation of the same feelings in his audience that he himself has when he reads the Scriptures, Perkins slides easily from logos, to ethos, to pathos.

What is particularly interesting is that in his privileging of the Word, by which the Spirit does the necessary preparatory work upon the preacher (as well as his audience), Perkins suggests the very “spiritism” that commentators like Toulouse claim he lacks in his treatment of the preaching arts. If by writing a methodological approach to preaching Perkins places ministers at the center of their own and others’ salvation, still he cautions that ministers’ “work upon” or “ministry of” the Word comes from and is directed toward professing the knowledge of Christ and expressing the majesty of the Spirit. The minister’s “ministry,” in other words, stems directly from his faith and is directed toward the faith of his congregation; the substance of his work is to shape his inward, individual faith and grace into outward signs that “speak” grace or, as Perkins writes, “express the grace of the heart by gracious speech” to the various spiritual conditions of his hearers. Perkins may indeed locate the origin, means, and end in grace, but the manner of its delivery or presentation he allows the minister to shape according to his speaking or writing situation, accounting particularly for the minister’s audience and their circumstances. Economic propriety (i.e. “ownership” or “natural right”) belongs to the Spirit as it manifests in the Word of God. Rhetorical and social propriety are an extension of economic propriety as the

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76 By “methodology” I mean the minister’s work upon the Scriptures, dividing and inventing upon them according to Ramist method, opening them according to the method of doctrine, reasons, and uses, and translating them into the straightforward, clear, and very often colloquial language that came to characterize “plain style.”
Spirit backs the words and work of the minister in his translation of the Word of God to the word of man.\textsuperscript{77}

Like the classical rhetoricians that so inform Perkins’ \textit{art} of prophesying, rhetorical propriety becomes situated as the absent center of Perkins’ writings on calling and work of the minister. The calling of the minister is brought about by the Spirit of God, and so the inspiration he gets by his reading of the Scriptures he must with humility ascribe to the Word and work of the Spirit in and through him. The minister is merely an instrument of God by whom God may speak to humanity in the language of humanity. The “suitability” of his message is the minister’s primary concern, which Perkins himself realizes in his sermon manual when, like Augustine, he baptizes classical rhetorical principles to meet the purpose of Christian conversion and further exhortation in the faith. Moving his hearers to convert or reexamine their faith in the message of

\textsuperscript{77} In his essay, “William Perkins: Elizabethan Apostle of ‘Practical Divinity,” Louis B. Wright argues that Perkins’ prolific writing career developed after his conversion when found a ready Protestant audience waiting for an author from their own ranks to fill the need of a distinctly Protestant casuistry. Perkins addressed unlearned readers in a plain and direct style that they might become informed of their spiritual estates. He treated doctrinal matters in these treatises, but with each publication, his discussion of “practical problems of conduct” grew more and more detailed. Beyond his reference to “practical problems of conduct,” Wright does not address Perkins’ focus on how rhetorical propriety shapes social propriety; however, Wright does suggest that because Perkins was writing for a growing middle-class readership shaped by a developing commercial society, he began concerning himself with questions of conscience and problems of conduct about economic affairs. Wright offers a short list of the kinds of questions Perkins treated in his writings:

“\textit{How farre a man may, with good conscience, proceed in the desiring and seeking of Riches?’}, “How a man may with good conscience possess and use Riches?’”, “How we may rightly use meates & drinkes, in such sort as our eating may be to Gods glory, and our owne comfort?'”, “Whether ornaments of gold, siluer, precious stones, silkes and veluets, &c. may not lawfully be vsed?'”, “What is the right, lawfull, and holy vse of apparel?'”, “Whether Recreations and sports are lawful and conuenient, and what be vnlawfull and vnconuenient?'”, “Who, or what persons must giue Almes?'”, “To whome must almes be giuen?'”, “How much releefe must euery man giue?’” (176-77)

This list shows that Perkins’ theological writings largely focused on the relation between bodily and spiritual needs, but his writings also reveal a moderate Puritanism, for in them he worked to explain, not question man’s material and spiritual estate: “the \textit{Law of nature},” argues Perkins, “sets downe and prescribes the distinctions of possessions, and proprietie of langs & goods, and the Gospel doth not abolish the law of nature.” (qtd. in Wright 177). For Perkins, civil and religious authorities work together to preserve the social and religious order, for worldly order reflects divine order.
the Scriptures suggests that the minister has first become convinced of the strength of that message himself that he might evoke a similar emotional response in his hearers. For Perkins, the minister’s gift of prophesying is also an art, whereby the minister measures his own fidelity to the Scriptures and the personal affect they have upon him by the degree to which he must address himself to, and render the message of the Scriptures meaningful in various ways and to meet various spiritual conditions of, his less knowledgeable and less inspired listeners.

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Chapter 4, Part 1

Uneasy Authorities:

The Rhetoric of Propriety in Early Modern Translations of the Holy Scriptures

Augustine’s preaching manual *On Christian Doctrine* and William Perkins’ preaching manual *The Art of Prophesying* offer two slightly different approaches to *ars praedicandi*. Perkins follows Augustine’s reading of Scripture through Scripture, offering Christ’s ministry in the Gospels as a model for preachers’ presentation of exegetical content. Both writers also turn to the language arts of grammar, rhetoric, and logic to explicate their methods of Scriptural interpretation and presentation, even as they are highly self-conscious about the role the classical language arts ought to play in the preaching arts. Augustine’s appeal to classical rhetoric is subtle. He distances himself from the Ciceronian rhetorical tradition in which he was trained, but clearly embraces Cicero’s perfect orator in his notion of the Christian orator. Perkins’ appeal to classical rhetoric is even subtler. He employs Ramist dialectic to discover and dispose his argument in *The Art of Prophesying*, suggesting that Puritan preachers ought to use this same method when they invent and arrange their sermons. Perkins returns to classical rhetoric in his treatment of plain style, however, echoing Cicero’s “oratorical offices” in his advice to ministers that it is their first duty to teach the Scriptures to their congregations and an attendant duty to convince their hearers by first becoming convinced themselves. Perkins reassigns Cicero’s second and third offices—delighting and moving the listener—to the Scriptures’ rhetoric, which delights and moves a congregation through the preacher’s expressions of delight and conviction. Augustine and Perkins’ cautious treatment of classical rhetoric in their preaching manuals shows that both writers were conscious of the paradox at the heart of the preaching arts: the contradiction of
delivering godly rhetoric by means of human rhetoric. Augustine and Perkins return time and again in their preaching manuals to delivering the Scriptures through the Scriptures, urging preachers to pray directly to God to inspire their words much like the Holy Spirit inspired the Scripture writers. Their appeal thus arises from a concern with the propriety of (human or classical) rhetoric in Christian preaching.

The propriety of rhetoric also becomes a central concern for translators of the Scriptures, for like preachers, they position themselves to deliver godly rhetoric by means of human rhetoric. With no unified method of Scriptural translation, early modern translators turned first to the early church fathers’ methods of Scriptural translation. Among the church fathers who wrote on Bible translation is Augustine, whose advice on the art of translation influenced early modern divines on the Continent and in England. Just as Augustine had subtly used classical rhetoric to expound his exegetical and preaching methods, he also turned to classical rhetoric as precedent for Scriptural translation. It was through their readings of Augustine and the other early church fathers that early modern Bible translators realized their “art” by using classical models like Cicero. Early modern Bible translators thus echo medieval and early modern preachers’ concerns about the propriety of using classical rhetoric, especially when they reflect upon their translation practice. In their preface to the King James Version of the Bible, “The Translators to the Reader,” for instance, the KJV translators even liken Bible translation to “written preaching” (422), which suggests that they thought of translation and preaching of the Scriptures as similar practices—translation as a form of “written preaching” and preaching as a kind of “translation” or opening of the Scriptures to the congregation. In fact, most early modern Bible translators were ministers by profession, so it is no surprise that their concerns about the propriety of using classical rhetoric entered into their writings on the Christian language arts.
Just as Chapters 1-3 discussed the development of Puritan preaching as a subtle conflation of Christian and classical rhetorical practices, Chapter 4, Parts 1 and 2 will discuss the development of Protestant translation as a simultaneous distancing from and embracing of classical rhetorical principles. Chapter 4, Part 1 more specifically traces the development of early modern translation theory to classical rhetorical models. Chapter 4, Part 2 examines the prefatory material to two of most popular Reformation translations of the Scriptures, the Geneva translation and the Authorized (King James) Version, to show that the propriety of these translations was chief among the translators’ concerns. Taken together, Chapter 4 Parts 1 and 2 trace to classical translation “theory” the Reformation translation practices that realized these two very different “Bibles of Puritanism.” The Geneva translators’ sense of rhetorical propriety developed from their desire for interpretive clarity according to distinctly Calvinist teachings; both the text and its marginalia constrain the reading and listening experience that it might teach congregants. The KJV translators’ sense of rhetorical propriety, on the other hand, developed from their positing a prudent reader or hearer able to discern the Scriptures’ proper message; the highly stylized text suggests an oratorical performance that aims to delight the audience, and the paucity of marginalia opens the text that it might move the audience to reflection. These two translations and their attendant rhetorics of propriety developed from very different religio-political situations, and so they realize very different religio-political motives. This is evident in the different methods the translators used to mediate the text’s “letter” and “spirit,” their attempts to replicate in the target language—that is, in good, clear English—the “word” and “sense” of the Scriptures’ source languages.

Once the Protestant Reformation got a foothold in England in the first half of the sixteenth century, several authorized and unauthorized vernacular translations of the Scriptures were quickly ushered into print. Scholars educated in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek were in high
demand, but “Englishing” the scriptures was still too new an idea for systematic approaches to develop. Early modern translators did indeed have historical precedent for translation of sacred texts into the vernacular.\textsuperscript{78} They turned to the medieval churchmen who translated the Scriptures into Greek and Latin. Like the churchmen before them, early modern translators offered conflicting warrants for their translation projects. They largely appealed to classical models—and here read “pagan” translations of secular texts—to support their approach to the translation of sacred texts. Even by the year of the Geneva Bible’s publication, no unified theory of translation existed that the Geneva translators could offer as warrant for the choices they made in their translation. The period was still without a proper conceptual apparatus to describe the art of translation. Translation “theories” largely appeared as metaphorical statements in translators’ prefaces to their translations, or they had to be deduced from the translation itself. Prefaces offered translators a place to explain the choices they made in their translation, and many translators read the prefaces of successful translations to find important passages on the translators’ methods. Many of the translations attempted during the period were popular translations of Greek and Latin classics, and this market for vernacular translation rivaled the Bible’s. Likewise, educators during the period, both in England and on the Continent, viewed Latin and Greek translation as an important literary activity that was central to their students’ vernacular training in grammar and rhetoric. Classical instruction coupled with markets for popular translations of the classics meant that translators looked to the classical sources themselves to cull passages on translation theory and method, many of which they found in Latin writers’ translations of Greek texts. Renaissance translators distilled these Latin writers’ statements on the art of translation into a few \textit{loci classici}, which translators of the Scriptures

\textsuperscript{78} Willis Barnstone argues in his book \textit{The Poetics of Translation} that the history of Bible translation is coterminous with the history of the Bible. For Barnstone, the Bible offers a “paradigm” for all translation because it raises all the issues of translation: propriety, fidelity, transfer, interpretation, manipulation.
drew on to develop their translations, albeit self-consciously and not without a keen sense of the propriety—specifically, the *rhetorical* propriety—of using classical sources to translate Judeo-Christian texts.

Classical Precedents to Scriptural Translation:

Cicero’s Oratorical and Horace’s Poetical Approach to Translation

From Cicero’s translation of two Greek orators’ speeches in *De optimo genere oratorum* (L. Concerning the best kind of orator), for instance, namely the debate between Aeschines and Demosthenes, Renaissance translators found Cicero praising “free” or “loose” translation. His notes on translation echo his notes on oratory, for he insists that successful translation, not unlike successful oratory, should instruct, delight, and move the minds of its audience. Cicero’s “oratorical” approach to translation is not all that surprising given his own success in oratory and that his statements on translation method appear in a translation of two great Greek orators’ speeches, Aeschines’ and Demosthenes’, but the oratorical offices Cicero recommends are better realized in translation when the translator conserves the “force and flavour of the passage” and resists translating the original “word for word.” Cicero describes the rhetorical goals of his translation in *De optimo genere oratorum*:

And this is our conclusion: that, since the most outstanding Greek orators were those from Athens, and that their chief was easily Demosthenes, anybody who imitates him will speak in the Attic style, and excellently to boot. Consequently, since Athenian orators are proposed for our imitation, to speak in the Attic style
is to speak well. But, because there are many misconceptions over what constitutes this style of composition, I propose to undertake a task useful for students, but not completely necessary for myself. For I have translated into Latin two of the most eloquent and most noble speeches in Athenian literature, those two speeches in which Aeschines and Demonsthenes [sic] oppose each other. And I have not translated like a mere hack, but in the manner of an orator, translating the same themes and their expression and sentence shapes in words consonant with our conventions. In so doing I did not think it necessary to translate word for word, but I have kept the force and flavour of the passage. For I saw my duty not as counting out words for the reader, but as weighing them out. And this is the goal of my project: to give my countrymen an understanding of what they are to seek from those models who aim to be Attic in style, and of the formulas of speech they are to have recourse to. (qtd. in Weissbort and Eysteinsson 21)

Cicero’s rhetorical aims in this passage are everywhere apparent, his chief rhetorical aim being to translate “in the manner of an orator” the Attic style into Latin for students of oratory. Because his primary concern is to capture the “excellence” of Demosthenes’ eloquence, Cicero allows himself the flexibility to depart from the Greek words in order to express not just the sense of the speech, but its sounds and its rhythms. He positions himself squarely against the mere “counter of words,” the “hack” who does not attend to the stylistic propriety of the original. Attending to propriety of the source language means that the translator does not just “count” words, but “weighs” them against the “formulas of speech” and “sentence shapes” he finds in the source language, and in so doing, discover the most fitting expressions in the target language—those that are “consonant with our [Latin] conventions.”
Appeals to propriety in translation also appear in Horace’s *Ars poetica*, which became a handbook for late-Elizabethan and early-Jacobean poets. Ben Jonson, for example, viewed Horace as a poetic mentor and companion. Horace’s passing remarks on the art of translation in *Ars poetica* were just as influential in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England as Cicero’s, and as Jonson’s translation of II. 128-44 of *Ars poetica* shows, Horace seems to have held a similar view of translation:

‘Tis hard, to speake things common properly:

And thou maist better bring a Rhapsody

Of Homers, forth in acts, then of thine owne,

First publish things unspoken, and unknowne.

Yet common matter thou thine own maist make,

For, being a Poët, thou maist feigne, create,

Not care, as thou wouldst faithfully translate,

To render word for word: nor with thy sleight

Of imitation, leape into a straight,

From whence thy Modestie, or Poëmes law

Forbids the forth againe thy foot to draw.

Nor so begin, as did that Circler late,

*I sing a noble War, and Priam’s Fate.*
What doth this Promiser such gaping worth

Afford? The Mountaines travail’d, and brought forth

A scorned Mouse! O, how much better this,

Who nought assaies unaptly, or amisse?

*Speake to me, Muse, the Man, who after Troy was sack’t,*

*Saw many Townes, and Men, and could their manners tract.*

Hee thinkes not, how to give you smoake from light,

But light from smoake; that he may draw his bright

Wonders forth after: (qtd. in Weissbort and Eysteinsson 22)

Many Renaissance translators offered this passage as support for their “fidelity to the original,” trading especially on the ambiguity of the lines “For, being a Poët, thou maist feigne, create, / Not care, as thou wouldst faithfully translate, / To render word for word: nor with thy sleight / Of imitation, leape into a straight” to make their case. Jonson’s translation of the lines shows the ambiguity of the “neither…nor” construction Horace writes in the Latin: “*nec uerbo uerbum curabis reddere fidus / interpres nec desilies imitator in artum*” (lines 133–34). The lines literally read “you [poet/translator] will neither worry about translating word for word as a faithful interpreter, nor as an imitator will you venture heedlessly into the art.” The “*nec*” in this passage cautions against rendering the source text *verbo verbum*, or word for word, as does the “*nec*” which precedes “imitator.” Though imitation later comes to have methodological warrant in Renaissance translation, Horace, like Cicero, opts for the inventive freedom usually afforded poets. However, just as propriety is central to Cicero’s rhetorical approach to translation, so too is
it central to Horace’s poetic approach. Like Cicero, Horace mentions the difficulty of properly rendering the source language “consonant with [Latin] conventions” when he writes that “It is difficult to say common things properly” (L. Difficile est proprie communia dicere). Moreover, after several cautionary notes about following the spirit, not the letter of the source language, Horace claims that it is best for the translator to capture the spirit of the original as a poet does. The poet invokes the Muse, who offers him an image or vision of the life and manners of the people whose language and culture he would translate into his own. Understanding the spirit of the people allows him to translate their language and culture, as Horace writes, “rightly” or “aptly”:

Quanto rectius hic, qui nil molitur inepte:

“Dic mihi, Musa, uirum, captae post tempora Troiae

qui mores hominum multorum uidit et urbes”.

Jonson renders the passage:

Who nought assaies unaptly, or amisse?

_Speake to me, Muse, the Man, who after Troy was sack’t,_

_Saw many Townes, and Men, and could their manners tract._

Propriety is central to Horace’s “vision” of translation, which, like Cicero’s own, undertakes to capture the “force and flavour” of the language as if it were living in the present, spoken by its people and overheard by its translator. Among other classical loci, Cicero’s brief strictures on translation reveal the importance of propriety in bringing the source language to life in the target language: “nec
In treating the propriety of translation from oratorical and poetic perspectives, respectively, Cicero and Horace both emphasize the “orality” of the source language. Just as Horace’s own passing commentary on translation method in *Ars poetica* was commonly misread and used to support arguments to translate the letter and not the spirit of a passage, Paul’s famous commentary on the Scriptures’ letter or law in 2 Corinthians, that “the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life” (3:6), was and still is commonly misread as privileging the orality of language, especially in the Word’s ministry (i.e. preaching) and translation. This misreading of Paul’s commentary on the letter, law, or Word abets Cicero and Horace’s emphasis on presenting the “spirit” of a passage and, coupled with the classical view, comes to represent, at least in part, one side of the debate over Scriptural translation. The substance of Paul’s commentary is not that the Scriptures kill and the Spirit gives life, but that Christ, the only man who lived the Law of Moses to the letter, prepared the way for the New Dispensation by his sacrifice. The New Dispensation marries Word and Spirit so that the Old Dispensation, as it was written upon tablets of stone, which man could not live up to, is now written upon the human heart by the Dispensation of the Holy Spirit. Word and Spirit come together in man’s

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79 My emphasis. The passage literally translates “having translated not like an interpreter, but like an orator, with the same opinions and with their same patterns and figures of speech, in words appropriate to our customs.”
faith in the Word, which is effected not so much by the preacher’s charisma or the translator’s skill, but by a proper measure of Word and Spirit. If clarity served preachers and translators as one of the “excellences” of language use that would deliver the message of the letter, law, or Word as unmediated as possible to Protestant congregations and readers of the Scriptures, then propriety was allocated to the Spirit alone. Only the Spirit could give life to the human heart to hear and speak the Word properly. The proper measure of Word and Spirit Paul later explains in his “analogy of faith.” As he writes in Romans 12:6, “We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.”

The language gifts which Cicero sees as the orator’s aptitude for teaching, delighting, and moving his audience, and which Horace understands as the poetic impulse, a visionary experience brought about by invoking the Muse, Christian Humanists view as graces given to them by God, gifts which they use properly only in proportion to their faith in God.80 The preacher’s ability to open the scriptures to his congregation and the translator’s aptitude for finding the apt or fitting turn of phrase are in proportion to their faith, so that every rhetorical move offers not only a measure of the man who makes it, but also a measure for its effect upon others. Implied in Protestants’ understanding of rhetorical aptitude, then, is not just an ability to turn “apt” or “fitting” phrases, but an ability to fit those phrases to the good of others, a sense of rhetorical propriety that turns from right or proper language use to righteous or justifiable language use. Indeed, Protestants’ understanding of the soul’s calling and justification is squarely situated in Paul’s analogy of faith, but the analogy, proportion, or measure seems to have classical precedents. What appears as a “gift of grace” in Christian doctrine appears in classical thinking as a “virtue.” Classical thinking abets Christian thinking when one’s

80 See Chapter 1, in which I treat Augustine’s development of his theory of proportions—aesthetic, ethical, and, later, moral. Motivating this development is Augustine’s conversion, after which he makes an attempt to “baptize” his Neo-Platonic thinking through Pauline doctrine. Augustine later offers Paul’s “analogy of faith” in On Christian Doctrine as theoretical and theological warrant for his advice to preachers to pray and meditate upon the Scriptures before preaching upon them.
aptitude—his virtues or gifts—serve as a measure of his virtue or the degree of his faith. Perhaps a vestige of oral culture in Pauline doctrine, men’s calling to a particular profession and their practice of that profession turns into a profession of faith, a means of justifying their earthly and spiritual lives. As Herman Frankel argues in his book *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, the orality of Homeric epic is crucial to Greek philosophers’ considerations of rhetorical propriety mainly because in the poetry and rhetoric of an oral culture like that of the ancient Greeks, propriety becomes an index of identity. He writes that, in ancient Greek culture, “factual report of what men do and say, everything that men are, is expressed, because they are no more than what they do and say and suffer” (79; qtd. in McKenna 26). Frankel notes that Homeric epic tells of the sayings, suffering, and actions of legendary Greek men, but the poetry also shows that the Greeks viewed verbal expression itself as a kind of action. What men do and what they say show us something of their character, even when they report to us about what others do and say. That a Greek’s reputation was so clearly bound up with his speech and actions places propriety at the center of Greek social life. The influence Greek social life had on Paul’s writings cannot be underestimated.

As the name implies, the Christian Humanist ideal that came to characterize the dominant worldview of Renaissance England resituated Pauline doctrine in the Greco-Roman social milieu that gave it life and meaning. Hebrew and Greek scholars charged with translating the Scriptures in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries therefore looked not only to the Scriptures themselves to guide their translation projects, but also to classical precedents like Cicero and Horace. They found their best model, however, in early church fathers, specifically St. Jerome and St. Augustine, whose writings achieved a tense, but not tenuous synthesis of classical and Christian ideals. Jerome’s famous dream illustrates the tension between classical aesthetic pleasure and Christian asceticism that the early church fathers were compelled to work through. For Jerome, who was born to a wealthy Christian father in Dalmatia, well instructed in Greek and Roman literature while at home, and later
sent to Rome where he came under the tutelage of Aelius Donatus, the best grammarian of the age, the Christianity of his father and the paganism of Rome came into conflict very early in his life. In several letters in which he describes his life after leaving Rome, Jerome notes the conflict in his soul and the attempts he makes to master his carnal desires, including the aesthetic pleasure he receives from reading studied eloquence of certain Latin authors. For instance, in a letter he wrote to Eustochius in 384, several years after the experience, Jerome reflects upon the many illnesses and temptations he suffered during his ascetic training in the desert of Chalcis, south of Antioch. He writes,

In the remotest part of a wild and stony desert, burnt up with the heat of the sun, so scorching that it frightens even the monks who live there, I seemed to myself to be in the midst of the delights and crowds of Rome. . . . In this exile and prison to which through fear of Hell I had voluntarily condemned myself, with no other company but scorpions and wild beasts, I many times imagined myself watching the dancing of Roman maidens as if I had been in the midst of them. My face was pallid with fasting, yet my will felt the assaults of desire. In my cold body and my parched flesh, which seemed dead before its death, passion was still able to live. Alone with the enemy, I threw myself in spirit at the feet of Jesus, watering them with my tears, and tamed my flesh by fasting whole weeks. I am not ashamed to disclose my temptations, though I grieve that I am not now what I then was. (“Epistola ad Eustochium” 7)

To the fasts by which he set out to master the desires of his flesh Jerome added the study of Hebrew to master the desires of his mind. By its difficulty and foreignness, Jerome thought he might draw his
mind from the fluency and gracefulness of both Greek and Latin, as he writes in his 411 letter to Rusticus:

When my soul was on fire with wicked thoughts, as a last resort, I became a pupil to a monk who had been a Jew, in order to learn the Hebrew alphabet. From the judicious precepts of Quintilian, the rich and fluent eloquence of Cicero, the graver style of Fronto, and the smoothness of Pliny, I turned to this language of hissing and broken-winded words. What labor it cost me, what difficulties I went through, how often I despaired and abandoned it and began again to learn, both I, who felt the burden, and they who lived with me, can bear witness. I thank our Lord that I now gather such sweet fruit from the bitter sowing of those studies. (“Epistola ad Rusticum” 12)

The tension Jerome felt between Christian austerity and classical, pagan aesthetics reached its height in a dream he later writes of having had while in the desert and suffering from one his many bouts of illness and temptation. It was at this time that he was studying Hebrew, but he had not yet left off reading the pagan classics for pleasure. In this famous dream sequence, Jerome describes himself standing before the tribunal of Christ, which asks him what he is. Jerome responds that he is a Christian, which his judge answers skeptically, “You, a Christian? You are a Ciceronian. Where your treasure is, there your heart is also” (“Epistola ad Eustochium” 30). Jerome writes that upon waking from this dream, he rid himself of his pagan library and turned instead to studying the eloquence of the Scriptures.

Jerome’s dream reveals the conflicting demands of Ciceronian aesthetics and Christian asceticism, a conflict squarely situated in stylistic propriety, which comes to inform his translation theory when he later translates the Bible. Even after his dream, Jerome seems to have followed the
Ciceronian injunction that a translator ought to attend to the spirit, not the letter, of the passage he is translating. However, in a letter he wrote to Pammachius, “On the Best Method of Translating,” Jerome distinguishes his method of translating secular writings from his method of translating sacred writings, saying “Not only do I admit, but I proclaim at the top of my voice, that in translating from Greek, except from Sacred Scripture, where even the order of the words is of God’s doing, I have not translated word by word, but sense for sense” (qtd. in Weissbort and Eysteinsson 30). Jerome cites several classical authorities to support this approach to translation, quoting especially and at length from Cicero’s Preface to his translation of speeches by Aeschines and Demosthenes. He explains that in order to properly convey the sense of a passage when translating secular texts, he must allow himself the freedom to depart from a literal rendering of the original language, his only caveat being that in the case of the Holy Scriptures, one ought to observe the words and their precise arrangement, for both are spiritually significant. Still, in this same letter, Jerome accounts for and defends those departures from the strict letter of sacred texts that achieve certain rhetorical effects without drastically altering the basic meaning of the original, citing several passages even in the authoritative Septuagint that prove problematical from a strictly literalist perspective:

81 In his book Memes of Translation: The Spread of Ideas in Translation Theory, Andrew Chesterman treats the moral quandary into which translators of the Scriptures were placed: not only was the Word itself holy, but the form in which the Word was delivered in the Scriptures was also holy. “To meddle with the original form of the scriptures,” writes Chesterman, “was to risk blasphemy, heresy; a translator might even risk his life ( . . . the translator Dolet [for instance] was indeed burnt at the stake for ‘mistranslating’ Plato in such a way as to suggest something heretical about posthumous existence of the soul)” (22). Chesterman observes that Bible translators appealed to two basic ideas, both of which had to work in tandem. The first was to appeal to the meaning of the text as a whole, which preserved the extended meaning despite changes the text’s form underwent in translation. Though Chesterman does not state it explicitly, this appeal was most often sounded as the analogy of faith. Translators referred to church doctrine to guide their translation of the Scriptures’ darker, more elusive passages. The second idea was the obverse of the first. Translators erred on the side of literalism in their translations of the Scriptures. Chesterman cites Erasmus’ thoughts on Biblical translation, for instance: “Erasmus wrote that he preferred ‘to sin through excessive scrupulousness rather than through excessive license’” (22), which further supports the major argument among early modern translators that they had to tread carefully between free and literal translation, especially when translating sacred writings.
There is nothing extraordinary about this procedure in secular or ecclesiastical writers when the translators of the Septuagint, the evangelists and the apostles, did the same thing in the sacred books. In St Mark, we read that the Lord said: “Talitha cumi.” This is commented in the text: “Which is translated: ‘My girl, I say to you, get up’” [Mark 5:41]. Dare you accuse the evangelist of lying because he adds “I say to you,” when all we have in the Hebrew is, “My girl, get up”? But to make it more emphatic and to translate the nuance of urgent command he added, “I say to you.” (qtd. in Weissbort and Eysteinsson 30)

Jerome offers other examples in which he states that “it is clear that, in their use of the Septuagint translation, the Apostles sought the sense, not the words,” proof that slight departures from the source language did not, and should not, threaten the stability of the Church. Even if no clear threat can be found, however, Jerome’s argument still reveals just how much translators’ stylistic choices have very real rhetorical and social consequences. Appeals to translators’ stylistic propriety thus belie attempts to ward off unwanted rhetorical and social effects:

The opening words of the Hebrew text of Psalm XXI are the very words Christ spoke on the cross: “Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani.” This means: “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me” [Ps. 21:2; cf. Matthew 27:46]. Let them state the reason why the Septuagint intercalates “look at me,” for it reads: “My God, my God, look at me, why have you abandoned me?” They will reply that there is no distortion in the sense if two or three words are added. Let them also realize that the stability of the Church is not threatened if, in the heat of dictation, I leave out a few words.

It is a long job to detail how much the Septuagint adds, how much it leaves out . . . . However, it is not for nothing that the Septuagint has become the official
church text: it was adopted either because it was the first and was produced before the coming of Christ, or because it was used by the apostles, at least where it did not differ from the Hebrew. (qtd. in Weissbort and Eysteinsson 30)

In other passages, Jerome distinguishes between translating secular texts and translating sacred texts, claiming that translators of sacred texts should closely observe the source text’s words and their precise arrangement. In this passage, however, he complicates the already complicated work of Scriptural translation, adding that even in the inspired and authoritative Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, the seventy scholars not only redacted the Hebrew texts, but also intercalated words and phrases to achieve certain rhetorical effects, like increasing the passage’s presence or urgency. Jerome makes a case for loose translation of even sacred texts as long as the translator preserves the meaning of the original.

At the heart of Jerome’s translation theory is a sense of stylistic propriety for good rhetorical effect, though he cautions that in the case of sacred texts, social propriety must be observed before stylistic propriety. For Jerome, such observances are not mere guesswork. The translator’s skill and prudence are everywhere apparent in his rendering of a passage, for he must attend to several contexts at once: the passage’s place in the text, or its “intratextual” position; the passage’s place vis-à-vis other passages, or its “intertextual” position; the passage’s meaning to the source culture, or its “social-historical” position; and the passage’s meaning to the receiving culture, or its “exegetical” position. Jerome locates the complexities of translation specifically in “the properties of a word,” or in “stylistic propriety,” in his Preface to his 380AD translation of the Chronicles of Eusebius 1-2. In these prefatory remarks, he notes the difficulty of translating from the source language turns of phrase that have no equivalent, or no graceful equivalent, in the target language, while at the same time being faithful to the meaning and intention of the original passage. Jerome writes at some length that
There is an old custom among men of letters of translating Greek books into Latin as an intellectual exercise, and also, what is more difficult, of translating fine poetry into Latin verse. The great Cicero translated whole books by Plato with rigorous closeness and, having translated the Roman, Aratus, into hexameters, he turned to Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*. In this, the golden flow of eloquence is sometimes muddied by some scabrous and turbulent shoals so that, those who do not realize that it is a translation, do not credit Cicero with such work. For it is difficult, when following the text of another language, not to overstep the mark in places, and hard to keep in the translation the grace of something well said in the original. Something is signified by the properties of a word: in my language I do not have anything to match, and when I try to render the full sense, I eat up the span of a respectably long life in the resulting sentence. [ . . . ] If I translate word for word, it sounds absurd; if from necessity, I change something in the word-order or in the language, I am seen to abdicate the responsibility of a translator. [ . . . ] I pray you that whatever you find disordered in this work, you read with the eye of a friend and not of a critic. And this is doubly important as you know that I dictated this at considerable speed to a secretary; and the difficulty of the task is attested to by the fact that the inspired volumes produced by the Septuagint translators have not kept their flavor in Greek. This consideration drove Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion [i.e. Theodosius] to produce almost a different book from the same work. Aquila tried to translate word for word, Symmachus preferred to follow the sense, and Theodotion did not want to go too far from the ancient versions. [ . . . ] Thus it came about that Sacred Scripture seemed so rough and uncouth that educated people, not knowing that it had been translated from the Hebrew, looked at the surface instead of the real meat and were put off by the
unprepossessing clothing of its style rather than finding the beautiful body
underneath. Finally, what is more melodious than the Book of Psalms, which can run
in iambics like our Horace or the Greek Pindar, or have the resonance of Alcaeus, or
the dignity of Sapho, or the flow of lyric meters. What is more beautiful than the
canticle of Deuteronomy and Isaiah, what more dignified than Solomon, or more
perfect than Job. Now these, as Josephus and Origen point out, all frame their poetry
in hexameters and pentameters. When we read them in Greek, they have a particular
sound, and when in Latin, they do not hang together. If there is anybody who does
not believe that the power of language is changed in translation, let him translate
Homer literally into Latin—or rather, let him translate Homer into prose. Then he
will see a laughable bit of work, and the greatest of poets scarcely able to speak. (qtd.
in Weissbort and Eysteinsson 29)

From his introduction of that old custom among lettered Romans of translating Greek books into
Latin as an intellectual exercise, to his conclusion that a literal translation of Homer into Latin verse
or, worse, into Latin prose leaves the reader with a “laughable bit of work,” Jerome is everywhere
interested in preserving the style and grace of the original text in his translation. Even Cicero, who for
Jerome had been the greatest Latin stylist, was not credited with his translations of certain Greek
authors, for he had followed the original too closely. Jerome also asks what has been added to and
lost from the various Greek translations of the Old Testament, from the redacted and intercalated
Septuagint, to the too literal translation produced by Aquila, the too liberal translation produced by
Symmachus, and the too close and careful translation produced by Theodosius. Even educated readers
have difficulty looking beyond the Greek in which the real “meat” of the Hebrew Scriptures is
dressed. It is the work of the translator, therefore, to find the most appropriate expression, translating
one place literally and another place more loosely.
The kind of care Jerome imparts to would-be translators of the Scriptures in his Preface to the *Chronicles* assumes a translator skilled enough to answer to the task. If even in the hands of experienced translators some secular texts suffer from ineloquence and error, how much more care should be devoted to the translation of the Scriptures, which can suffer neither ineloquence nor error.

As experienced a translator as Jerome himself was, still he was censured for taking too much license in his translation of the Scriptures, and not just by calumniators who criticized his Latin for either ineloquence or error, but also by friends who said his decision to translate the Old Testament directly from the Hebrew was itself an error. In a letter he wrote to Jerome commenting on the plan for the Vulgate, Augustine articulates the problem of Scriptural translation as one in which the translator must everywhere make the right decision. He must choose the proper source text to make his translation. He must clearly and consistently note redactions in the source text if it is itself a translation as well as any redactions he has made to his source text. He must translate in a style that is both clear and appropriate to the source text’s intended audience and his text’s target audience.

Augustine’s letter reveals not only the stylistic dangers Scriptural translation presents, but also the social dangers that can arise from certain stylistic choices. He writes,

I have further comment in this letter: I have just found out that you have translated the Book of Job from the Hebrew, even though we already have a Latin translation of yours from the Greek text. In that translation you marked Hebrew passages missing from the Greek text with asterisks, and with daggers, Greek passages missing in the Hebrew. Your diligence was such that we can see in certain passages particular words signifying the stars are in the Hebrew, but not in the Greek. Furthermore, in this last version of yours taken from the Hebrew, we do not find the same fidelity to words. And a careful reader will have some trouble in working out why in your first version asterisks are marked in with such care that we know where even the most
minor particles in Hebrew are missing in the Greek texts; and in your second from
the Hebrew, this editorial work is so careless, that it seems that the same particles
appear in both texts [. . .]

In the first paragraph of his letter, Augustine questions Jerome’s decision to retranslate the Old
Testament from the Hebrew when he has already published a careful enough Latin translation of the
Book of Job from the Greek. Augustine adds that in his translation from the Greek Jerome had not
merely noted intercalations in the Greek text, but also Hebrew passages which were omitted from the
Greek text. Augustine praises Jerome’s careful editorial work in his Latin translation of the Greek of
Job as “fidelity” to the words of the source text, a kind of faithfulness that becomes all the more
important as the argument of this letter develops.

Near the end of the first paragraph, Augustine remarks that readers do not find the same
fidelity to words in Jerome’s translation from the Hebrew as they did in his translation from the
Greek, and in the second and third paragraphs, Augustine outlines the consequences of Jerome’s
editorial carelessness and “infidelity” to the Greek. Augustine is forced to admit,

Honestly, I would rather you translate the Scriptures for us from the canonical texts
which the seventy translators left us. For it will cause extreme difficulty if your
translation is widely adopted: the Latin churches will then differ violently from the
Greek churches. Most serious of all, as it is the best known, anybody who disagrees
will easily prove you wrong on the strength of the Greek. For anybody who seizes on
something he finds strange in a version taken from the Hebrew and accuses you of
error, will hardly, if ever, pay regard to the Hebrew by which you defend your
reading. And even if your version were to be adopted, who will stand to see the
condemnation of so many Greek and Latin traditions? Because even experts in
Hebrew can have other answers, it comes to this, that you seem to be the only one competent to prove them wrong. But before what judge, if you can find one perceptive enough?

And so I am immensely grateful to God for your labours in translating the Gospels from the Greek, because in almost no case is there difficulty when we have recourse to the Greek text. If then any controversialist argues for a hoary old false reading, we can bring out the books, compare them, and easily verify or refute. And if certain remarkable cases rightly call forth our assent, is there anybody stubborn enough not to recognize such a useful achievement, or give it its due praise? Would you be good enough to tell me why, in your view, there is so much disagreement between the Hebrew texts and the Greek of the Septuagint? For the Septuagint has so much authority that it has, with reason, been widely disseminated. As I remember, this fact is attested to by the custom of the Apostles, and also by your own testimony. And for this reason, you would have done better if you had given us an accurate translation of the Greek of the Septuagint. The present Latin versions differ so much from manuscript to manuscript that the situation is intolerable; and they are so suspect (it is not unlikely that there is something else in the Greek), that we can hardly expect to prove anything by quoting them. (qtd. in Weissborth and Eystenstein 32-33)

In the second and third paragraphs of this letter, then, Augustine argues that if Jerome’s translation from the Hebrew were to be widely adopted in the Latin churches, an unnecessary rift will form between the Latin and Greek churches, the Latin text being based on the Hebrew rather than on the Greek. Also, adds Augustine, it is even more difficult to defend a text based on the Hebrew, for so
few have a reading knowledge of Hebrew that turning to the source text to settle disputes within or between churches would be absurd. In such disagreements, Jerome would find himself among a handful of Hebrew scholars who may or may not be learned in church doctrine, though there are many men both learned in church doctrine and who read and speak Greek. Augustine asks whether it is prudent to question the authority of the Greek text by looking beyond it to the Hebrew. Better to have produced a more accurate translation of the Greek of the Septuagint than to have produced a Latin translation of the Hebrew, for the present Latin translations differ so much from one another that, Augustine admits, “the situation is intolerable” (33). Although the Greek of the Septuagint is based on the very Hebrew Jerome translated into Latin, Augustine makes a case in this letter for the authority and propriety of the Greek and the traditions built upon it.

Augustine suggests that Jerome’s editorial carelessness in his Latin translation from the Hebrew threatens religious faith, basing his entire argument in this letter on the claim that “in this last version [the Vulgate]…taken from the Hebrew, we do not find the same fidelity to words” (32). The rhetorical move that Augustine here makes is an appeal to Jerome’s sense of “prop(r)iety”—not just his sense of what is stylistically, rhetorically, and socially fitting, but also his faith in the same. By appealing to Jerome’s “fidelity” to words, Augustine elevates what would otherwise be considered a question of stylistic propriety, especially if Jerome were translating a secular text, to a question of religious piety. If, by extension, Augustine does not question Jerome’s personal faith, he does indeed question the wisdom of his decision to translate from the Hebrew. Stylistic and editorial fidelity aside, Jerome’s decision to translate directly from the Hebrew questions the authority of the Septuagint as the Scriptural basis for both the Greek and Latin churches. Before Jerome’s Vulgate, it had been easy enough to refute error within or between churches simply by turning to the Greek text, whose authority was indisputable. Its age, its wide dissemination, and its use among the apostles all attest to its authority. Jerome’s own writings had also testified to the Septuagint’s authority. Augustine
therefore asks Jerome that if he had noted disagreement between the Hebrew texts and the Greek of the Septuagint, then why did he not redact the Greek or produce a more authoritative Latin translation. At the heart of Augustine’s question is a concern for the unity of the Christian Church, a concern which he expresses by an appeal to stylistic propriety. Augustine appeals to Jerome’s sense of “prop(ri)ety,” in which he conflates stylistic propriety and stylistic fidelity, in order to show that various translations of the same texts, with little agreement among them, threaten social cohesion among the Latin and Greek churches. If these churches can prove little by quoting texts of little authority, then the stylistic and rhetorical improprieties Jerome had committed in his careless editorial work in the Vulgate, or what is worse, his unwise choice to bypass the authority of the Septuagint, both risk destroying the social proprieties that the Scriptures underwrite in the Christian community. For Augustine, then, stylistic infidelity threatens both Scriptural and communal integrity.

Early Modern Translation Theory:

Increasing the Authority of the Vulgar Tongues

These very same concerns were central in the debates over Bible translation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when Protestants on the Continent and in England moved to translate the Bible into the vernacular. Bible translation in England was particularly fraught with controversy, for Protestantism developed unevenly and uneasily alongside a lingering Catholicism in the Anglican Church. The sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries saw eight translations of the Bible into English, starting with Tyndale’s translation of the New Testament, on which succeeding translations were based. Of the translations produced during Henry VIII’s reign—the Coverdale Bible, the Matthew’s
Bible, and the Great Bible—it was the Great Bible that Henry authorized to be read aloud in Anglican Church services. The Great Bible survived as the Bible of church services in England until the ascension of Mary, who steered the country back toward Catholicism. During Mary’s reign, Protestants fled to Geneva, Switzerland and began work on the Geneva translation, whose New Testament was also a revision of Tyndale’s translation. The Geneva exiles saw the death of Mary and the ascension of Elizabeth as an opportunity to make their translation the Bible of the Anglican Church. Elizabeth’s political prudence outweighed her Protestant leanings, however, and shortly after she took the throne, she commissioned another English translation of the Bible to replace the Great Bible, the Bishops’ Bible. While the Geneva translation did not take its rightful place upon Anglican Church lecterns, as its translators had hoped, it had become an authoritative English translation—having been translated directly from the Hebrew and the Greek—and slowly gained ascendancy in England to become the most popular Bible in English homes. If the Bishops’ Bible was the public English Bible read aloud at church, then the Geneva Bible was the private English Bible read both aloud and silently at home. At the turn of the century when Elizabeth died and James took the throne, radical Protestants again saw it as an opportunity to make the Geneva translation the public Bible in England. Like Elizabeth, however, James wished to maintain the status quo, commissioning another translation of the Bible which would rival the Geneva translation’s quality, but which would be patterned after the Bishops’ Bible. James appreciated the authority of the Geneva Bible, inasmuch as its translators followed Tyndale in translating the texts directly from the Hebrew and Greek, but James despised the overt Calvinism of certain words of the Geneva translation as well as its marginal notes. The Authorized Version was therefore ideologically closer to the Bishops’ Bible, even if the translation project’s expressed intention, which James had set down in writing, was closer to the Geneva translation.
The translators of the Geneva Bible and the Authorized Version had several precedents, not just for translation, but for translation of the Scriptures. Training in the ancient languages had at no period in English history been better than in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There were enough Hebrew and Greek scholars to translate directly from the source texts and serve to check one another’s translation, so that the concern Augustine raises in his letter about Jerome’s having no peers skilled enough in the Hebrew to settle disputes over the translation were no longer an issue. Men like Tyndale had become more common, even if none felt they could rival Tyndale’s skill in rendering the Hebrew and Greek texts in a readable English idiom. Though the period’s translators were increasingly equipped with the ancient languages needed to translate the Scriptures, still they were without a unified theory of translation to support their lexical and grammatical choices. Many of the period’s translators—translators of both secular and sacred texts—either looked to classical precedents (or in the case of translators of the Scriptures, to both classical and patristic precedents) to distill their translation theory or explain their approach in prefaces to their translation. Coupled with an interesting mixture of Ciceronian, Horatian, and patristic approaches, early modern translators themselves developed fairly sophisticated theories of translation, both metaphorical and metalinguistic. Because it was still in its nascency, English translators largely explained their translation theories metaphorically. Contemporary translators on the Continent, specifically French translators, were a little more sophisticated than their English counterparts. French translation theory contained a metalinguistic awareness that English translators would not begin to codify until the last quarter of the seventeenth century.

Apart from translators’ prefaces, which briefly noted the translators’ methodology for translating the text that followed them, few translators wrote entire treatises on the art of translation. Much of this theoretical work had been traditionally handled in treatises on rhetoric or poetics, particularly in the artes poeticae published during the Renaissance. The first translator to develop an
extended treatise on the art of translation was Estienne Dolet (1509-46), a French humanist printer who published many of Calvin’s works in France. Published in 1540, Dolet’s *La manière de bien traduire d’une langue en aultre*, or *The Way to Translate Well from One Language to Another*, was the first of its kind, and despite the treatise’s brevity, it had enormous influence on contemporary French translators and successive generations of translators working on both the Continent and in the British Isles. Similar work would not be published in England until John Dryden discussed recurring questions of the art of translation, questions he began to answer in the different translator’s notes and epistles dedicatory with which he prefaced his late-seventeenth-century translations of Greek and Roman classics.

Dolet organizes *La manière* into five main rules for novice translators: First, he advises that “the translator must understand perfectly the sense and matter of the author he is translating” (qtd. in Weissbort and Eysteinsson 74), without which the translator may lose himself among the words of the text he is translating. Second is that “the translator [must] have perfect knowledge of the language of the author he is translating, and be likewise excellent in the language into which he is going to translate” (74). Dolet adds under this second rule that “every language has its own properties, turns of phrase, expressions, and vehemences that are peculiar to it” (74), and that the translator must be keenly aware of these properties and peculiarities in both the source and target languages if he is to translate well. Dolet makes this second point about attending to the social and rhetorical propriety of both the source and target languages the basis of the stylistic advice he offers translators in the paragraphs that follow. His third rule is that in translating, “one must not be servile to the point of rendering word for word” (75). Here he follows Cicero’s advice “to weigh, not count” the words of a passage and Horace’s injunction not to translate a passage word for word (L. *nec verbo verbum*). Dolet again turns to the second point to explain the third—that because he possesses those qualities already mentioned, the translator will seek the meaning of a passage and the author’s intention while
at the same time expressing the passage’s properties and peculiarities in both the source and target languages. He therefore cautions translators never to begin their translation of a sentence at its beginning, which is merely to follow the order of the words rather than weigh their overall meaning and their author’s intent. Dolet’s fourth rule concerns translation from the ancient tongues into the vulgar tongues. Because French, Italian, Spanish, German, and English are not as rich as Latin and Greek, Dolet warns translators neither to bastardize the ancient tongue by, say, “Englishing” an untranslatable Latin word or phrase, nor to add too much to the vulgar tongues by creating neologisms to bypass the thornier passages with circumlocutions. Confronted with such difficulties a translator should instead resort to common usage and idiomatic phrasing in the vulgar tongue, especially if it approximates the difficult passage’s meaning, and use rare words rarely and develop new words with all due discretion. At the center of Dolet’s fourth rule is his wish to preserve the purity and propriety of both languages, even as the vulgar languages might be enriched by their contact with the ancient languages and with one another. Dolet’s fifth rule is the mere stylistic extension of the others, that the good translator closely observes “rhetorical numbers: that is to say, a joining and arranging of terms with such sweetness that not alone the soul is pleased, but also the ear is delighted and never hurt by such harmony of language” (75). From this fifth and final rule Dolet concludes that it is above all the translator’s task to faithfully render the “soul” or “spirit” of the source text in his target text. He aims to capture first the “spirit” of the source text, or its intention, and then the stylistic peculiarities of the author vis-à-vis the properties of his language; both stand as the “spirit” of the author and his culture. The translator will only prove eloquent and his translation successful, Dolet argues, provided that he can reproduce in his own language, in his own style, and for his own people the “spirit” of the original.

Capturing the “spirit” of the original text, its author’s intent, or the expressive force of his language as characteristic of his and his people’s “spirit” became a chief concern of many sixteenth-
and seventh-century translators. In the absence of contemporary theoretical treatments of translation, especially in Renaissance England, translators made de facto appeals to classical rhetorical tradition to authorize their work. Deferring to their rhetorical training, these translators drew on classical theories of imitation and mimesis, which gave their approaches proper theoretical warrant. In France, for example, following Estienne Dolet and influencing several English writers was Joachim Du Bellay, a poet who with Pierre de Ronsard led the literary group known as La Pléiade. In 1549 Du Bellay published *La Défence et Illustration de la langue françayse*, which, in effect, became the literary group’s manifesto in defense of the vigor and clarity of the French language. In *La Défence* Du Bellay claims that the vigor of any language stems from the richness of its expression. He defends the vulgar tongues against those “ambitious admirers of Greek and Latin” who hold that the vernacular has little to offer the orator and the poet. If a people’s means of

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82 Elizabeth Eisenstein argues in *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* that “authorized” translations and printings of the Bible gave expression to the “character” or “spirit” of Protestant nations even as it separated them from one another: “Once a vernacular version was officially authorized,” writes Eisenstein, “the Bible was ‘nationalized,’ so to speak, in a way that divided Protestant churches and reinforced extant linguistic frontiers” (358). With the translation and publication of the Authorized Version, Protestants in England became not just a “people of the Book,” but a people of an *English* book that registered a distinct national spirit and character.

83 Du Bellay influenced many English writers, among them Edmund Spenser, who translated several of Du Bellay’s sonnet sequences from the French under the title *Visions of Bellay*. Commentators have noted that “Spenser’s engagement with Du Bellay dated from his youth and was sustained throughout his career” (Cowling 384). Many have debated the quality of Spenser’s translations of Du Bellay’s poetry, some arguing for Spenser’s creative translation, others for his creative adaptation, and still others for simple mistranslation of Du Bellay’s French. In creative translation, an author attempts to render the effects of the source text in the target language, and thus remain close to the source text. In creative adaptation, an author captures the sense of the source text, but abandons its form and style. Apart from debating the quality and type of Spenser’s translation, few commentators have debated the influence Du Bellay has had on Spenser’s work, particularly *The Fairie Queene*. Spenser’s decision to write the poem in archaic English, which would give the poem’s style the authority of age, resounds Du Bellay’s argument about the “riches” of the vernacular as a measure for the “soul” of a people, not to mention the echoes in *The Fairie Queene* of certain themes in Du Bellay’s poetry, such as “the decadence of earthly power the potential for rebirth” (Cowling 385).

Benson Bobrick also points out in *Wide as the Waters: The Story of the English Bible and the Revolution It Inspired* that King James “was especially well read in the French poets, such as Ronsard, Du Bellay, and Marot” (206). That these poets were at the center of La Pléiade is certainly significant, for James’s commissioning of the Authorized Version would do for the English language what this literary group intended to do for the French language, that is, authorize it, further enrich it, and elevate it as an expression of the people’s greatness.
expression tells us something of the “soul” of the people, writes Du Bellay, then the richness of their language is proportional to the greatness of their soul. Du Bellay quickly adds that the French language is not as impoverished as the classicists have maintained, but merely in its nascence. French has yet to develop apt and fitting expressions that adequately characterize the soul of its people. Du Bellay says that the French writers of old thought less of cultivating their language for posterity than of leaving many examples of great deeds:

And if our language is not as copious and rich as the Greek or Latin, that ought not to be imputed to any fault of the language, as if it of itself could ever be other than poor and sterile: but the fault ought rather to be laid to the ignorance of our ancestors, who (as someone has said in speaking of the ancient Romans), holding in higher respect doing well than talking well, and preferring to leave to posterity the examples, rather than the rules, of virtuous action, deprived themselves of the glory of their high deeds, and us of the fruit of the imitating of them: and in the same way have left us our language so impoverished and naked that it needs the ornaments and (if I may so speak) the pens of others. But who would say that Greek and Latin had always been of that excellence which we see in the times of Homer, of Demosthenes, of Virgil, of Cicero? (qtd. in Weissbort and Eysteinsson 77).

Whatever metaphor Du Bellay uses to answer the classicists’ criticism, at the core of his argument is an appeal to the propriety of the French tongue. Contemporary translators working with Greek or Latin texts and translating these texts into their countries’ vernaculars shared Du Bellay’s anxiety, explaining in the prefaces to their translations the propriety of their enterprise. Some translators, like Dolet, appealed to the various “properties” of the language from which they were translating. They focused especially on certain of the author’s expressions, either invoking the author’s spirit as a muse
for their own work or infusing the text with the spirit of the culture they would see translated into their own. By working with these “properties” or “essences” of the language, of the author, or of the culture, translators sought a kind of “natural” propriety\(^4\) in both the source and target languages conventions. Other translators, like Du Bellay, added a social and economic element to the natural metaphor, arguing that the “properties” of a language are not its exclusive property and that it is altogether proper for living, developing languages to borrow expressions from, or trade expressions with, developed languages for enrichment of both.

Just as the Romans borrowed from the Greek, so must the French borrow from both Latin and Greek authors to enrich their language, folding virtuous expressions into the French idiom since, among other Romance languages, it stems from the Latin. In his seventh chapter, titled “How the

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\(^4\) In his essay “The Rhetoric of Translation,” Peter France compares the “rhetorical situation” of the orator to that of the literary translator. In his building of a historical context for his argument, France points out that the early modern rhetoric schools used different language exercises in different languages to build their students’ vocabularies and sensitivity to language. For example, the “progymnasmata of the ancients, adapted and extended in such works as Erasmus’s *De duplici copia* or the textbooks of the Jesuits, aimed at giving young students a mastery of the resources of language, whether their native language or the foreign language which was at the heart of education, Latin” (255-56). Students used the *progymnasmata* first to recognize and imitate commonplaces in these languages, and once they had mastered them, use the commonplaces to invent novel turns of phrase or even adapt entirely new narratives on the skeletons of well-known narratives. From the *progymnasmata* students of rhetoric learned amplification and invention strategies. Another exercise used the rhetoric schools was the “lipogram, a time-honoured game in which the writer (or speaker) denies him- or herself the use of one or more letters of the alphabet,” but uses these constraints for verbal inventiveness. Just as poets worked with complex rhyme schemes or stanzaic forms, the rhetoric students used verbal constraints to spark their creativity. Among the most difficult, but most effective of the rhetoric schools’ exercises was translation, an exercise known to the students as “prose composition.” The students translated prose passages or poetry from classical or foreign languages into their native tongue, and from their native language into the classical and foreign languages they were learning, in order to acquire these languages’ “literary” register. France adds that his comparison between rhetoric and translation holds not just because the one is often used in tandem with the other, but also because translation faced the same kind of criticism. Like rhetoric, translation mediates the message, leaving it susceptible to the contention that it distorts the truth either for ideological or artistic reasons. Either way, the translator-rhetor benefits by his mediation, shaping the truth to meet his purpose or adding superfluous ornament to show his virtuosity. The orator’s characteristic defense to this charge—used especially in the rhetoric of the pulpit—is that he is merely an empty vessel or conduit through which the unmediated truth of an original passes. The critic’s riposte, of course, is that rhetoric is “artful” or “studied” language use, which cannot but “translate” an otherwise simple message by emphasizing some parts and deemphasizing, or even omitting, other parts. Likewise, translation aims at an “original” text, but cannot help but use rhetoric to represent the original. The translator merely mediates by his “art” what was stated “honestly,” “openly,” “organically,” or “naturally” in the original tongue.
Romans have enriched their language,” Du Bellay again mixes natural and economic metaphors to treat Rome’s “appropriation” or “engraftment” of Greek literature to their own. He writes,

If the Romans (someone will say), did not conquer by the labor of translation, by what means then did they so enrich their language, even almost to equality with the Greek? By imitating the better Greek authors, transforming themselves through them, devouring them; and, after having digested them well, converting them into blood and nurture; each taking to himself according to his nature and the argument which he wishes to choose, the best author, all of whose rarest and most exquisite virtues they observe diligently, appropriating and embodying these, like engraftments, as I have said before, to their language. That caused the Romans to build those sublime writings that we delight in and admire so greatly, counting some equal, others preferable, to the Greek. And what I say Cicero and Virgil well prove, whom gladly I always name among, the Latins, of whom the one, as he was entirely given over to the imitation of the Greeks. (qtd. in Weissbort and Eysteinsson 79)

Though Du Bellay mixes metaphors in this passage, in one place referring to the art of translation as “conquering,” in another place as “digestion,” and yet in other places as “appropriation” and “engrafting,” he consistently refers to imitation as the Romans’ means of enriching their language. Implied in each of these metaphors is the idea that translation through imitation can be a kind of violence done to the source language’s culture, even as it nourishes the target language’s culture and allows for its development. Imitative translation transforms the receiving culture just as much as it transforms the host culture, but as Du Bellay points out, the pairing must first be an appropriate one.

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85 My emphasis.
before the receiving culture can really appropriate the host culture. Propriety informs the receiving culture’s appropriation and extension of the source culture.

The choices the translator makes about whose work he will translate and how he will translate it is really little more than an exercise in stylistic and rhetorical propriety, as he sets out to calibrate his own style to the style of the author he is translating, but only so that he may suit the author’s style the idiom of his people. Or, to use Du Bellay’s metaphors, imitation begins with the translator’s wandering into a foreign land, but with the intention to conquer it for his people. Imitation begins with a culture hungry for growth and development and ends with the translator’s devouring and digesting those cultural artifacts that would nourish his culture most. Imitation begins with the translator’s learning the properties of a particular cultural artifact, only to make it in part his own.

86 In Chapter VII, “To enlarge French literature by imitation of the ancient Greek and Latin authors,” Du Bellay writes of the transformative effect of translation, saying that by its very nature imitation changes the translator and the translator’s culture as much as it changes the cultural artifact he has translated:

Write himself, then, must he who wishes to enrich his language, write in imitation of the best Greek and Latin authors; at all their best qualities, as at a fair target, direct the aim of his style; for it cannot be doubted that the great part of the art is contained in imitation: and as it was for the ancients most praiseworthy to invent well, so is most profitable to well to imitate them, even for those whose language is not yet plentiful and rich. But he must understand, who wishes to imitate, that it is no easy thing to follow well the excellent qualities of a good author, as if to transform himself with him, for nature has so wrought even those things which appeal, most similar, that by some mark or feature they can be distinguished. I say this because there are many in every literature who, without penetrating to the secret, innermost part of an author whom they have approached, adapt themselves solely to first appearances, and spend themselves rather on the beauty of words than on the might of the real content. (qtd. in Weissbort and Eysteinsson 79)

To “enrich” his own language and culture, the translator must first attend closely to the properties of the cultural artifact he is translating and the “excellent qualities of the author” who produced it, which Du Bellay adds is no easy task. If the translator is to translate well, he must “transform himself” with the translation so that the source text, its author, and its culture infect him by their contact. This exchange, if it is to “profit” readers, must move them beyond the text’s mere stylistic trappings and communicate its real substance. Everywhere in this passage Du Bellay slides from literary style to literary substance, using metaphors of personal finance (e.g. enrich, profit, plenty, spend) to distinguish the form of the writing as a kind of empty currency from the content of the writing as the real substance that informs the currency, profits the reader, and enriches the receiving culture. The metaphor fits if one accounts for the dual meanings of “commerce” as both discursive and economic exchange. Motivating stylistic and rhetorical propriety, then, is economic propriety, for the translator’s authority is contingent not merely on the authority—or “cultural capital”—of the source author for the source culture and target culture, but also on the degree to which the translator can replicate the source author’s rhetoric and style and therefore “trade” on the source author’s authority or “cultural capital.” In a religious context, translators’ appeals to “inspired translation,” much like preachers’ appeals to “inspired preaching,” trade on the authority of the Holy Spirit, whereby discursive exchange becomes economic exchange in a kind of spiritual economy.
Motivating the translator’s considerations of stylistic and rhetorical propriety in the making of his translation is an always-tense consideration of economic propriety. The translator turns from questions about the properties of the languages from and to which he is translating (i.e. stylistic propriety) to questions about the qualities of the people from and to whom he is translating (i.e. rhetorical propriety). Always present, if not always perceptible, to the translator is the question “How much?” How much do I know about the source language and culture to translate the passage properly? How much do I change the passage to render it in a readable idiom? How much can I change before the passage belongs more to me than the author who wrote it? The question “How much?” motivates a translation just as much as it does a transaction. Asking “How much?” moves translator or imitator from discursive exchange to economic exchange, and the translator or imitator’s answer to this question underwrites his authority.

In his essay “Genealogies of Translation Theory: Jerome,” Lawrence Venuti argues for a sharp contrast between translation theory until the seventeenth century and translation theory from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Renaissance translation theory established itself on classical and patristic approaches to translation, which were in turn founded upon classical approaches to rhetoric. Venuti terms the “classical” or “rhetorical” approach to translation instrumental in that the translator sees his art as ideally reproducing the sense and style of the source language in the target language. Though the form of the original text is changed when it undergoes translation, a translator adopting the “instrumental” approach believes that his translation is merely a rhetorical performance—that he can approach the author’s spirit or intent and the text’s literal and figural meanings as problems of invention and elocution, respectively, and approximate them as such in the target language. The strength of his translation is therefore contingent upon his rhetorical skill. When translation theory developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, translators began attending to the various determinants that shape the translation, such as the cultural constituencies, social situations, and historical moments of both the original author and the translator. What develops, argues Venuti, is a more ethical, hermeneutic approach to translation whereby the translator moves beyond the classical word-for-word, sense-for-sense dichotomy that characterized the instrumental approach and becomes more sensitive to the linguistic, social, cultural, and historical differences in the source language he cannot exactly replicate in the target language. In other words, Venuti notes a radical contextualization of meaning in the hermeneutic approach that is simply not present in the instrumental approach’s “approximation” and ultimate “appropriation” of the source in the target. Venuti admits that both approaches consist of “interpretants” that become either formal or thematic determinants during the process of transforming the source text into the translation, but he also adds that the major difference between approaches is that the hermeneutic model accounts for the richly intertextual character of translation:

Formal interpretants include a concept of equivalence, such as a semantic correspondence based on dictionary definitions, or a concept of style, a distinctive lexicon and syntax related to a genre or discourse. Thematic interpretants are codes: specific values, beliefs, and representations; a
Sixteenth-century French translators like Dolet and Du Bellay theorized their art in ways that other translators working on the Continent and in England had yet to articulate. Contemporary English translators’ prefaces would not register the same metalinguistic awareness as their French counterparts until the latter half of the seventeenth century when John Dryden began translating ancient classics and updating the modern ones and writing prefaces in which he reflected on the “problems of translation.” Still, some translators working in late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth-century England resounded in their translators’ prefaces conventions they learned from their classical and patristic predecessors, depending of course on the nature of the translation—namely, whether they were translating secular or sacred texts; and some English translators echoed the aims of their French counterparts, which suggests that they were familiar with how the French were approaching the art. Since most translators working in England lacked any clear theoretical guide for their art,

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The more the translator accounts for the contextualization of meaning in his translation, the more his approach takes on a “hermeneutical” character, which, for Venuti, also constitutes more responsible or ethical language practice. In the case of Scriptural translation, especially those produced in Renaissance England, the less the translators comment on the linguistic, social, and historical differences between the source and target cultures, the more “politicized” the translation. Translations relatively bare of commentary, such as the Geneva translation and the Authorized Version, paradoxically close off readers’ connection to the strangeness of the biblical past even as they disclose the Scriptures’ meaning. Thus, there is a fundamental difference between a religious poet like John Milton, who, like the Geneva and KJV translators, utilizes the Scriptures to advance a national political agenda—the English as Israelites—and a religious poet like Edward Taylor, who, writing in the wake of the nationalizing agenda, renders the Scriptures strange through the rich intertextual patterning he achieves in his poetry. Taylor’s Meditations are hermeneutical in Venuti’s sense of the term in that they connect Taylor to the biblical past and yet reveal a strange disconnect between the Bible’s cultural materials and Taylor’s own. Taylor’s juxtaposition of Scriptural images and homely, Anglo-American images is just one such example. In his “Genealogies of Translation Theory,” then, Venuti traces changing theories of “authority” in translation and how these theories suggest rhetorics of propriety, as writers debate the question of who becomes the “owner” or “author” of texts in translation.

88 The church fathers largely drew on translation procedures that had become conventional by the time of Cicero and Horace though they made every effort to “baptize” the pagan texts to meet their Christian ends.
however, they largely looked to classical rhetoric for theoretical warrant. As T. R. Steiner argues in *English Translation Theory, 1650-1800,*

[F]ollowing rhetoric-school practice in the conversion of foreign texts, the translator was likely to construe [his text] literally as long as he could; he overcame the inevitable problems by gloss, paraphrase, extended explanation, or even further departures from the text. While “literary” translations were concerned with style—even with that of the original—few works were published for solely literary reasons, and moral-didactic or patriotic imperatives often crossed, if not canceled, the stylistic intention. (8)

Some translators of secular texts, like George Chapman, privileged the “literary” translation as the ideal translation, though such translators, Chapman included, began their careers employing the advice of the rhetoric schools. They slowly graduated from rhetorical translation to poetic translation, from simple and straightforward linguistic mimesis to poetic imitation and, later, to poetic invention. Chapman, for example, appended a mere sentence of reflection upon the art to his incomplete 1598 translation of Homer, which he titled *Seaven Bookes of the Illiad:* “The worth of a skillful and worthy translator is to observe the sentences, figures and formes of speech proposed in his author, his true sence of height, and to adorne them with figures and formes of oration fitted to the original in the same tongue to which they were translated” (qtd. in Steiner 8). The sentence clearly echoes Cicero’s oratorical approach to translation, particularly its proprietary emphasis on “fitting” the translated form to the original form. With the dearth of writing on the art of translation, many translators, and especially those working early in their careers, turned like Chapman does in his preface either to the rhetoric handbooks or to what they learned in the rhetoric schools to explain their methods. Translators’ prefaces of the period largely reproduce rhetorical commonplaces, and not without
warrant, for much of what concerns the translator also concerns the orator. The notion of “figural equivalence” that Chapman notes in his preface to Homer, for instance, is indicative of the kind of early writing on translation in England. In Roman Jacobsen’s summary, “rhetoric . . . supplied a mean between sensum-sensu and verbum-verbo, which we might call figuram-figura, governed by the larger conception of ‘true height,’ in a word, of decorum” (qtd. in Steiner 9). If a rhetorical approach marked the early career of a translator, then a poetical approach marks his later career, the only constant being his attention stylistic decorum and discursive propriety.

When he publishes his complete translation of the *Iliad* more than a decade later in 1611, then, Chapman not only augments his original translation, but also adds extensively to his prefatory remarks about the art. His remarks are mainly in a poetical vein so that without abandoning the rhetorical approach, for he admits that Horace’s and Cicero’s advice still informs his innovative approach, Chapman adds poetical inspiration to the rhetorical arts. In fact, he draws a distinction between “Art” and “arte.” He claims that a translation fails when the translator uses too much “Art,” by which he means too much “effort, ratiocination, method: not only pedantry, but also the entire scholarly, intellectual approach to literature which led to cognates like bad translation and the denial of vernacular poetry” (9). An “Artistic” translation is a facile translation, one in which the translator either becomes tediously literalist in his approach or needlessly glosses or paraphrases passages that otherwise carry a compact richness usually seen only in poetry. If a translator’s work fails on account of his “Art,” his use of “arte” only allows him to penetrate the grammar and etymologies of his source text, which may give him an idea about Homer’s language and culture, but by which he never attains a true understanding of Homer’s soul. Having become a seasoned translator by the time he revised and added to his early translation of Homer, Chapman’s appeal to the translation of Homer’s soul here shows that English translation theory, albeit still undeveloped, followed French translation theory closely in its conception of the “ideal” translation. Like his French predecessors, Chapman
mocked the literalist, paraphrastic approach of his contemporaries, distinguishing the “natural”
translation from the “artistic” translation. To achieve a “natural” translation, writes Chapman, the
translator must

... aspire

As well to reach the spirit that was spent

In [the author’s] example, as with arte to pierce

His Grammar and etymology of words. [I, 10] (qtd. in Steiner 10)

Steiner points out that Chapman’s use of the words “Art,” “Nature,” and “Soul” to describe
his work are some of the most theoretically elusive terms in Renaissance literary criticism. Steiner
adds, however, that these words tell us something about Chapman’s approach to the art and about
general trends in contemporary English translation. The meanings that tend to cluster around
“Nature,” at least those meanings pertinent to English Renaissance translation theory, are the
“natural” or “native” tongue of a writer. As Steiner argues,

The native tongue, for instance, is indissolubly connected to a poem’s essential
grandeur: not only do men write more gracefully in it than in any other language, but
they can also reach greater poetic depths. Hence the pedantic translator must suffer a
double loss: necessarily unable to capture the native “full soule” of the original in a
new language, he also sacrifices the grace of his “natural dialect” by his rude attempt
(I, 9-10). “Nature,” therefore, as the director and norm of translation implies concern
with the “life” of a masterpiece rather than with the superficies which seem to occupy
grammar and rhetoric. (10)
Grammar and rhetoric are the analytical means to proper translation, but Chapman’s “key” to translation is to embrace, even embody, the soul of the author. He therefore surpasses stylistic and rhetorical propriety to embrace spiritual “rapture” or “possession” as the means to ideal translation. He writes that mere “interpreters” have failed to translate Homer properly because

They [have] fail’d to search his deepe and treasurous heart.

The cause was since they wanted the fit key

Of Nature, in their down-right strength of Art,

With Poesie to open Poesie… [1, 10] (qtd. in Steiner 10)

Literalists and paraphrasts aim to take possession of an author, and this is where they fail. Chapman aims to be possessed by his author, to fit soul to soul, nature to nature, “Poesie to open Poesie” to appropriately English Homer’s Greek. Chapman turns stylistic propriety on its head, claiming that a translator only fits style to style by “becoming” his author, by entering into his artistic musings so deeply that he possesses his author by being possessed with the spirit of his author. Chapman takes up an interesting place in the history of translation theory in England in that he further elucidates several of the metaphors the French were using in their treatment of the art and adds much to the development of the art in England before Dryden begins to write more explicitly about what Chapman implies in his metaphors. Chapman’s metaphors also elucidate contemporary Bible translation not only for the role “inspiration” plays in the writing and translation of the Scriptures, but also for the role glosses and paraphrases play in “opening” the Scriptures. England’s two most important Bible translation projects during the period were the Geneva Translation and the “Authorized” or King James Version. Like Chapman, the companies of translators working on both
texts were without a unified translation theory, but then again, like Chapman, the metaphors they
employ in their prefaces and the choices they make in their texts reveal much about their methods.

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Chapter 4, Part 2

The Prefatory Material to the Geneva Translation:

An Unauthorized Search for Authority in England

Of the two bible translations considered “Bibles of Puritanism” in England—the Geneva translation and the Authorized (King James) Version—the Geneva translation was the more radical. The Geneva Bible never really gained a foothold in England because of its “foreign” influence. Its marginal notes, unmistakably Calvinist in doctrine, made it not just a “Bible of Puritanism,” but a “Bible of Dissent,” threatening the moderate Protestantism re-codified in the Elizabethan Religious Settlement of 1559. Protestants fleeing England at the accession of Mary sought to return to England from exile upon Elizabeth’s accession and to sever the ties Mary had reestablished with the Roman Catholic Church. Those Protestants who were well received in Calvin’s Geneva during Mary’s reign had worked toward producing a fresh translation of the Bible using Tyndale’s partial translation of the Old Testament as their starting point. The project attracted some of the best contemporary Greek and Hebrew scholars, whose work on the Geneva translation made it far superior to existing translations. Upon Elizabeth’s accession to the throne, Protestants returning from exile in Geneva sought to replace the Great Bible of 1539, which had gained currency with the high-church party in the Church of England, with their own translation. Elizabeth’s “middle way” offered no official place for the Geneva translation in England, however, and English bishops responded to the quality of the Geneva translation by setting to work on their own version, published in 1568 and called the Bishops’ Bible.
The Geneva Bible’s contentious history in England stems not from the translation, which was the best of its day, but rather from the overt Calvinism of its marginal notes. In their notes on the text, the translators preferred words like “congregation” and “elder” to “church” and “priest,” which clearly threatened to replace the Episcopal polity of the Church of England with the Presbyterian polity that Calvin had developed in Geneva. That the Geneva Bible translators were aware of their offense against the authority of the Church of England’s hierarchy from the bishops up to its Supreme Head is apparent in their Preface to the text, which they address to their new queen, soliciting her help in building the foundation of a new church in England. The translators’ appeals are to the social and economic propriety of their endeavor first and then to the rhetorical and stylistic propriety of the project. The political consequences of their stylistic choices become readily apparent at the Preface’s very opening, for the translators choose to address, first and at some length, the political situation in England through a religious analogy, all but burying their treatment of the rhetorical, grammatical, and lexical choices they made in their translation. The Preface to the Geneva Bible reveals that the translators saw the Scriptures, or rather their “right” translation of the text, as central not only to religious reform in England, but also to political reform in England. The Preface therefore shows that rhetorical and stylistic propriety are the substance of social and economic reform.

The religious reforms the translators have in mind are that Elizabeth will rebuild the material and spiritual temple of the Lord in England with herself as its material head and Christ as its spiritual head. The translators compare Elizabeth to a modern Zerubbabel, who, the Books of Ezra and Esdras relate, rebuilt the material temple according to the Lord’s commandment. After accepting the commandment, Zerubbabel and his people were beset by many hardships difficult to overcome, and the great rebuilding work he began was delayed by many adversaries difficult to identify. As a modern Zerubbabel, Elizabeth and her people must expect to be beset by similar
hardships and her and her people’s work likewise delayed by unseen enemies, both foreign and
domestic. Of all her foreign enemies, the translators claim Elizabeth has cause to fear Papists the
most, “who under pretense of favouring God’s Word, traitorously seek to erect idolatry and to
destroy [her] Majesty” (357). Of her domestic enemies, Elizabeth must guard herself and her
people against “worldlings, who . . . have forsaken Christ for the lord of this world,” and
“ambitious prelates, who . . . can abide none but themselves” (357). To aid Elizabeth in this fight
against her and her people’s worldly and religious adversaries, the translators present to her
Majesty “the Holy Scriptures faithfully and plainly translated according to the languages wherein
they were first written by the Holy Ghost,” offering their translation as “the first foundation and
groundwork, according whereunto the good stones of this building must be framed, and the evil
tried out and rejected” (357). The translators set their project at the center of religious reform in
England, emphasizing the sheer importance of the Word rightly, or rather “plainly” and
“faithfully,” translated. Their translation becomes the very foundation of the church they would
see “rebuilt” in England, the groundwork upon which the stones of the church would be cut, set,
and based.

Like Perkins’s “rule” of the canon by which the preacher tests the propriety of his
sermon, the translators offer Elizabeth their translation as the “rule” by which she might clear and
level the land for the temple’s foundation in the Word. The translators appeal especially to
Elizabeth’s “zeal” as the head of both church and state whose responsibility it is to rebuild the
temple in England—an appeal literally and, by the translators’ own metaphor, figuratively
“grounded” in the social and economic propriety the crown symbolizes. The translators write,

Now as he that goeth about to lay a foundation surely, first taketh away such
impediments as might justly hurt, let or deform the work; so it is necessary that
your grace’s zeal appear herein, that neither the crafty persuasion of man, neither worldly policy, or natural fear dissuade you to root it out, cut down and destroy these weeds and impediments which do not only deface your building, but utterly endeavor, yea and threaten the ruin thereof. (357)

The translators claim that as long as the queen makes “God’s Word [her] line and rule to follow” (357) in this work, her work of advancing the cause of the true religion in England will be blessed with success. First, however, she must clear her dominions of idolaters, worldlings, and prelates before commencing the building work, for like weeds, these worldly men will deface, crack, and ultimately ruin the foundations of the material and spiritual temple.

Good ground is ground free of any impediments, but the translators warn that the work of uprooting impediments and clearing the ground for building very often breeds disturbance and disquiet in a realm. When setting about the work of clearing, then, Elizabeth must exercise great care and prudence to judge her people aright. Such wisdom comes from the Lord alone:

Wherefore [for the work of rooting out evil and advancing true religion] great wisdom, not worldly, but heavenly, here is required, which your grace must earnestly crave of the Lord, as did Solomon, to whom God gave an understanding heart to judge his people aright, and to discern between good and bad . . . how much more will he indue your grace and other godly princes and chief governors with a principal spirit, that you may procure and command things necessary for this most holy temple, foresee and take heed of things that might hinder it, and abolish and destroy whatsoever might impair and overthrow the same? (358)
The translators suggest that Elizabeth’s political acumen will not suffice for the kind of reforming work they have in mind. To judge her people rightly as so many “stones” from which she will build the spiritual temple in England, Elizabeth must pray for a “heavenly” wisdom beyond mere “worldly” political prudence.  

Holding to the same metaphor of rebuilding the material and spiritual temple in England, the translators admonish Elizabeth in this letter to heed and establish the Word of God in the

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89 In Areopagitica, John Milton refers to the “quick, ingenuous” people of England as the stones with which the true English church must be built so that England can take its proper place as the vanguard of a more complete Reformation on the Continent. For the Geneva translators, an appropriate translation of the Scriptures will serve as cornerstone of the English church. For Milton, proper education and open discourse will serve as the mortar that will paradoxically unify the diversely-opinionated people of England and solidify their faith in the true church. Rhetorical propriety—in Biblical translation and free, open religious discourse—will ensure social propriety in England and on the Continent. In Areopagitica, Milton urges, Lords and Commons of England, consider what nation it is whereof ye are, and whereof ye are the governors: a nation not slow and dull, but of a quick, ingenious, and piercing spirit, acute to invent, subtle and sinewy to discourse, not beneath the reach of any point the highest that human capacity can soar to. . . . Why else was this nation chosen before any other, that out of her as out of Sion should be proclaimed and sounded forth the first tidings and trumpet of Reformation to all Europe. . . . But now, as our obdurate clergy have with violence demeaned the matter, we are become hitherto the latest and the backwardest scholars, of whom God offered to have made us the teachers. Now once again by all concurrence of signs, and by the general instinct of holy and devout men, as they daily and solemnly express their thoughts, God is decreeing to begin some new and great period in his Church, even to the reforming of Reformation itself: what does he then but reveal Himself to his servants, and as his manner is, first to his Englishmen; I say as his manner is, first to us, though we mark not the method of his counsels, and are unworthy. . . . Under these fantastic terrors of sect and schism, we wrong the earnest and zealous thirst after knowledge and understanding which God hath stirred up in this city. . . . Yet these are the men cried out against for schismatics and sectarians; as if, while the temple of the Lord was building, some cutting, some squaring the marble, others bewing the cedars, there should be a sort of irrational men who could not consider there must be many schisms and many dissections made in the quarry and in the timber, ere the house of God can be built. And when every stone is laid artfully together, it can not be united into a continuity, it can but be contiguous in this world; neither can every piece of the building be of one form; nay rather the perfection consists in this, that out of many moderate varieties and brotherly dissimilitudes that are not vastly disproportional arises the goodly and the graceful symmetry that commends the whole pile and structure. Let us therefore be more considerate builders, more wise in spiritual architecture, when great reformation is expected. (742-44)

Like the Geneva translators, Milton offers readers of Areopagitica the metaphor of English people as the material stones of the spiritual temple in order to advance the national political agenda. Proper Scriptural translation, coupled with “brotherly dissimilitudes” engendered by free and open religious discourse, ensures the English people’s place as God’s chosen people to lead the European Reformation.
realm “with all speed, lest the wrath of the Lord fall upon [her] for the neglecting thereof” (358). Not only must Elizabeth embrace the Word of God herself, but she must also see it taught, preached, and maintained in all the countries and dominions over which she rules. These kingly commands, continue the translators, will ensure that Elizabeth’s subjects will observe their covenant and “walk after the ways of the Lord” (358). The translators here draw on one of St. Augustine’s favorite metaphors for social propriety— which way to walk—and like Augustine, urge the religious wayfarer to seek his or her way in the Word of God. The Word stands as source and measure of rightness and righteousness, without which “all man’s diligence and endeavors are] of none effect, for without this Word we cannot discern between justice and injury, protection and oppression, wisdom and foolishness, knowledge and ignorance, god and evil” (358). The very reforming work the translators encourage Elizabeth to embark upon, they thereafter admit, she must not begin until she has consulted the Word of God and “inquired thereof at his mouth” (358). Like the subjects at her command, she too is governed by the will of God as it gets articulated in the Word, and it is her duty to obey. Like her subjects, however, the office of interpretation has not been given to Elizabeth. She too must consult the ministers as the “mouthpieces” and “messengers” of the Lord to learn “the manner of this building” (358).

The translators back their reversal of political power with scriptural warrants, claiming that it was not lawful for Moses to proceed in the building of the material tabernacle until God had shown him the pattern, nor to prescribe any laws or ceremonies until God had clearly commanded him to do so. Elizabeth is governed by the same God and must await the same commands as Moses:

Now as concerning the manner of this building, it is not according to man, nor after the wisdom of the flesh, but of the Spirit, and according to the Word of
God, whose ways are divers from man’s ways . . . how can it be lawful to proceed in this spiritual building any other way, than Jesus Christ the Son of God, who is both the foundation, head and chief cornerstone thereof, hath commanded by his Word? And forasmuch as he hath established and left an order in his Church for the building up of his body, appointing some to be apostles, some prophets, others evangelists, some pastors and teachers, he signifieth that every one according as he is placed in this body which is the Church, ought to enquire of his ministers concerning the will of the Lord, which is revealed in his Word. (358-59)

The translators call Elizabeth’s attention to her place in the Church as it relates to the place of the ministers. She has not been granted sufficient knowledge or judgment to interpret the will of God rightly as expressed in the Scriptures. This office has been given to the ministers alone. The Geneva translators thus place the reforms they are calling for at two removes from Elizabeth: Before she can command that the material and spiritual temple be built in England, the translators advise that she consult the ministers to see whether “the manner of this building” is according to the Word of God. The first kind of propriety to which the translators appeal in calling for religious reform in England is social propriety. And yet, the translators ground their appeal to social propriety in rhetorical propriety when one considers that the source of the ministers’ counsel is the Scriptures the Geneva translators have just finished translating. The translators’ implicit appeal to rhetorical propriety anticipates their appeals to stylistic propriety when they later explain in their letter addressed to the brethren of England the grammatical and lexical choices they made in their translation, choices that would certainly have very real social, political, and economic consequences should religious reforms in England be founded upon the Geneva translation.
Near the end of their letter to Elizabeth, the translators close with appeals to economic propriety—that Elizabeth might willingly adopt the role of God’s holy instrument in England and that English brethren might make of themselves an example for the rest of the world’s godly folk to follow. Elizabeth’s prerogative makes her sole proprietor of religious reform in England. The translators nevertheless claim that two theological conditions must be met before the English set about the work of building a truly holy temple in England, and the order in which they present these conditions to Elizabeth is rightly arranged so that “steadfast faith” precedes “good fruits.” The first is “that we have a lively and steadfast faith in Christ Jesus, who must dwell in our hearts as the only means and assurance of our salvation” (359). To advance the building of the material church, the translators urge Elizabeth to see herself as one of many “lively stones” that rest upon Christ as a foundation of solid rock. In Christ’s church, Elizabeth is one stone among many. They follow their first metaphor of construction with a second metaphor of bodily constitution whereby the Christian church and Christ are coupled to form a single body in Christ, with the church comprising several members and a body which Christ joins to himself as their head. In this Christian body, Elizabeth is one member or body part among many. Her faith and the faith of her subjects inform their respective places and roles in this body, but they are nonetheless parts of the same body.

The second condition that must be met before temple building might be advanced in England is that “our faith,” breed “good fruits, so that our godly conversation may serve us as a witness to confirm our election, and be an example to all others to walk as appertaineth to the vocation wherunto they are called” (359). The translators’ appeal to economic propriety here serves to establish social propriety. In the spiritual economy they suggest in this and preceding passages, the translators urge their English readers, including Elizabeth, to answer their calling and accept the vocation to which they are called. Their answer and acceptance is an act of faith as
they recognize their place within the spiritual economy. Their activity within their vocation and the “good fruit” their activity produces brings about the good works they need to realize their role within the spiritual economy and their value to the spiritual community—which serve as testimony not only confirming the worker’s election, but also exemplifying “which way to walk” to other potential workers whose faith has not yet been sufficient enough for them to answer the call to a vocation.

Elizabeth’s role, responsibility, and trial in this spiritual economy is to show herself “strong and bold in God’s matters” and “build up the ruins of God’s house to his glory” (360). The translators remind Elizabeth of “God’s wonderful mercies toward [her] at all seasons, [God] who hath pulled [her] out of the mouth of lions, and . . . from [her] youth . . . brought her up in the Holy Scriptures” (360). That she has benefitted from God’s grace is apparent to all, whether in England or abroad, from the moment she ascended the throne of England. The translators thus call upon Elizabeth to recognize the debt she owes to God and his church, writing that on account of her ascension “the hope of men is so increased that they cannot help but look that God should bring to pass some wonderful work by [her] grace to the universal comfort of his Church” (360).

The translators remind Elizabeth that to settle accounts on the several mercies she has received she must serve as God’s faithful instrument in England. The eyes of the world are upon England in close scrutiny that the lives and works of Englishmen agree with their professions of faith and serve as an example to foreign believers. The translators’ appeal to economic propriety takes its most dramatic turn when they accord England a central place in the history of the world, arguing that this fledgling empire will survive as long as Elizabeth places the Church of Christ at the crux of her imperial program, and noting that “the Church of Christ even under the cross hath from the beginning of the world been victorious, and shall be everlastingly” (360).
All other kingdoms, monarchies, empires since the beginning of the world—the Babylonians, Persians, Grecians, and Romans—“have fallen and taken their end” (360), the translators contend, because they were neither founded upon “a lively and steadfast faith in Christ Jesus,” nor built from the “lively stones” that are the members of his Church (359). The material, economic fate of England in this long history of imperial rises and falls the translators tie directly to Elizabeth’s settling of the debt she owes to God and her people in the spiritual economy of the Christian Church. Elizabeth’s “ownership” of her spiritual debt serves as the economic basis for real and material as well as religious propriety in England. Her economic propriety ensures social propriety in turn as Englishmen answer their own callings and accept their vocations. Their work is to commit themselves in one way or another to building the temple of the Lord in England, and inasmuch as their work implies their faith, it testifies to the workers’ election and exemplifies to others a godly way of life. With their translation of the Bible at the center of religious reform in England and abroad, the Geneva translators’ “rhetoric of propriety” in their letter to Queen Elizabeth and in their letter to the brethren of England, Scotland, and Ireland shows well the intersection between text and history. Whereas the translators argue in their letter to Queen Elizabeth for the monarch’s assurance of economic and social propriety in her realms, they defend the grammatical and lexical choices they made in their translation in their letter to the brethren. The translators devote a large part of their letter to the brethren to showing how proper biblical translation (i.e. stylistic propriety) will ensure proper religious practice (i.e. social and economic propriety) in England and abroad.

The translators open their letter to the brethren of England, Scotland, and Ireland explaining the exigency of their translation project and urging brethren in the British Isles to embrace the Geneva translation with the greatest speed. They explain that their exigency arose from God’s “unspeakable mercy” in calling the translators toward the “marvelous light of his
Gospel,” and they express their thanks to God in mercifully regarding them “after so horrible backsliding and falling away from Christ to Antichrist, from light to darkness, from the living God to dead and dumb idols” (360). Worship in England had taken a horrible turn during Mary’s reign away from the “living God” of Christ’s true Church back to the “dead and dumb idols” that adorned the Catholic liturgy. Even after this backsliding, Mary’s death and Elizabeth’s ascension to the throne proved the right and proper time to build up the true temple of Christ in England.90

90 Although the rhetoric of the epistle to Queen Elizabeth and the epistle to brethren inhabiting the British Isles urges the English nation to return to the true faith, nowhere does it argue for political revolution in England. Mary’s death and Elizabeth’s ascension to the English throne was proof enough of God’s grace that, even during Mary’s reign, the Geneva translators did not foment revolution in the Geneva translation’s prefatory material or marginalia. Rather, they rested upon their faith in England’s chosen and proper place as a reforming nation. Tom Furniss concludes from his survey of the Geneva Bible’s marginalia in “Reading the Geneva Bible: Notes toward an English Revolution?” that, contrary to what many commentators say that the Geneva Bible is a revolutionary or seditious text, “the Geneva Bible’s marginal notes [and editorial apparatus] could only be used to legitimize revolution [against Mary Tudor and Charles I almost a century later] through radically reductive reading strategies” (1). Though some of the notes and prefatory materials encourage a revolutionary response to tyrants, many more passages recommend “obedience or passive resistance” (1). Coupled with the translation itself, Furniss argues for Geneva’s “internal political undecidability.” Furniss’ argument does not disprove the Geneva translators’ political agenda, which only strengthened when Elizabeth ascended the throne—that England was chosen by God to lead the European Reformation. What it does reveal is that radically-minded readers found passages in the Geneva translation to support their call for revolution, even though the Geneva translators took pains to balance these “revolutionary” passages with more politically-moderate passages.

The paradox of the Scriptures as both transcending and being motivated by the political and economic conditions of their translation is further elucidated by David Glowacki, who observes in “The Structure of Power in Biblical Translation” that the Bible is “written [and] guaranteed…by the Spirit of God, crystallized in antiquity, never to be changed” and yet “dynamic human political and economic forces ultimately drive and accomplish the translation enterprise” (198). Glowacki focuses on the prefatory materials appended to the Geneva translation and King James Version of the Bible, for example, to demonstrate how their translators negotiated the paradox of their translation enterprise. In both cases, argues Glowacki, “the power structures in which the translations are embedded are clear: King James, directed by God, is responsible for the translation that bears his own name” and “the Geneva Bible is sanctioned by Queen Elizabeth who is the builder of God’s spiritual temple” (198). The prefaces of both texts thus deal pretty plainly and straightforwardly with the tension:

[T]he human power matrix in which the text is situated is divinely arranged. The economic forces, the political forces, and the effort of the translators are ultimately sanctioned by God. In this context, [writes Glowacki,] the translators praise the beneficent powers that have sanctioned and funded the translation, and they speak clearly regarding the unambiguous evangelical goals of their translation enterprise, frequently citing biblical stories and characters to illustrate these goals. (198).

At the crux of the Bible translators’ enterprise, then, is to see their work as a crucial moment in the unfolding of ecumenical history. The rhetoric of translators’ prefatory material is a rhetoric of propriety inasmuch as the translators view the historical moment of their translation, their role as translators, the
God moved the translators to seize this opportunity, and they write with urgency to their English brethren to advance their translation project as one of the “most evident signs [or] tokens of God’s especial love and favour” toward them, that even “after so cruel murther of God’s saints [as had occurred during Mary’s reign] . . . [they] are not altogether cast off, as were the Israelites” (360). It is only proper that because God has shown special love and favor to the brethren of England, they should commit their lives to “walk[ing] in his fear and love” and to “procur[ing] the glory of his holy name,” which is chiefly attained, the translators continue, “by the knowledge and practising of the Word of God” (360-61). The translators appeal to a “kairotic” form of propriety here and elsewhere in their letter to the brethren. They argue that after many years of backsliding toward idolatry, the time is right for promoting religious reform in England; that because religious reform is properly attained by knowledge and practice of the Word of God, any religious reform attempted in England must be grounded directly in the Scriptures; that because English translations of the Scriptures have until this time not supported the kind of religious reform necessary to build the true Church of Christ in England, the Geneva translators have produced a translation that more properly meets this end. The translators thus argue for the propriety of their translation project and the propriety of the rhetorical (i.e. exegetical), grammatical, and lexical choices they made in their translation.

First among the translators’ concerns is that they have achieved clarity and consistency in their translation. Because the Scriptures ensure religious and social cohesion between themselves and their English brethren, the translators have aimed first for “the purity of the Word and the right sense of the Holy Ghost” in their translation (361). Like their English brethren, the translators seek to return to the “purity” of the early church by seeing a translation into print political and spiritual conditions of their readers, and the economic opportunities of their nation as perfectly appropriate for this work, so perfect in fact that it must indeed have God’s sanction and blessing.
whose “right sense” will not only correct the mistranslations that have preceded the Geneva translation into print, but also the liturgical errors and errors in church governance that find their basis in these mistranslations. The Geneva translators claim that, in light of all the recent advances in the knowledge of the ancient tongues in which the Scriptures were written, they are in a better position than their predecessors to translate the Scriptures “properly” and thus revise them to meet the Holy Ghost’s intended meaning and reform the Church of Christ as it was originally conceived:

[W]e thought that we could bestow our labours and study in nothing which could be more acceptable to God and comfortable to his Church than in the translating of the Holy Scriptures into our native tongue; the which thing, albeit that divers heretofore have endeavored to achieve, yet considering the infancy of those times and the imperfect knowledge of the tongues, in respect of this ripe age and clear light which God hath now revealed, the translations required greatly to be perused and reformed. (361)

The Geneva translators situate their project squarely within the larger reformation project, stating that God has thought it fit to bless this historical moment with a keener knowledge of the tongues in which the Scriptures were written so that the early church might be recovered. The translators’ call for reform is certainly aligned with the humanist principle of *ad fontes*, which came to characterize Renaissance scholars’ understanding of knowledge and served as the basis of humanist education in the arts. Rather than drink from the river of knowledge “downstream,” humanist scholars sought its “wellspring.” They endeavored to return to the sources of knowledge and avail themselves of all the scholarly equipment they had at their disposal to achieve “undiluted” understanding. What humanists aspire to in academic and political contexts, church
reformers aspire to in a religious context— that is, pure, proper, and unmediated knowledge. To persuade their English brethren that they have delivered the Scriptures to them “purely, properly, and unmediated,” the Geneva translators argue that propriety has governed the rhetorical and stylistic choices they made in their translation.

The translators admit that though they have aimed for a faithful rendering of the text, the clarity and accuracy of their translation is wholly dependent upon the measure of grace that God has given them. With this admission the translators unburden their consciences to the reader:

“And this we may with good conscience protest, that we have in every point and word, according to the measure of knowledge which it pleased Almighty God to give us, faithfully rendered the text, and in all hard places most sincerely expounded the same” (361). The method the translators used to expound the “hard places” they consider particularly worthy of comment. In an effort to “restore [the text] to all integrity” according to the “right sense of the Holy Ghost,” the translators explain that they have “most reverently kept the propriety of the words” and sought “lively phrase[s] of the Hebrew” in many places, even though these phrases might “seem somewhat hard in…ears that are not well practised” (361). The translators established their own integrity on the integrity of the text, which makes the propriety of their lexical and exegetical choices a marker and measure of their faith. In the marginal notes especially, the translators marked (‘) the “diversity of speech or reading” that ambiguous phrases in the Scriptures had suggested and prior translations had seen into print. Having consulted these translations, the Geneva translators noted multiple readings of the text, but only insofar as it seemed to them “agreeable to the mind of the Holy Ghost and proper for [the English] language” (362). The translators’ note their sense of stylistic propriety because it directly affects their and their readers’ exegetical choices. Marking

91 Though I separate politics and religion to show how humanist and Reformation ideals serve to reinforce one another, early modern religion and politics so thoroughly saturated each other that they cannot be separated without severely limiting our historical understanding of both.
the “diversity of speech or reading” in which certain passages of Scripture might be rendered strengthens the translators’ ethos, for it is by these marginal notes that they aim to arrive at a more comprehensive sense of these passages. The integrity of the translators hinges directly on the integrity of the translation; the translation’s integrity in turn depends on the translation’s “grace [i.e. clarity] and propriety,” particularly in those places where the Hebrew and Greek cannot be properly understood by those unpracticed in these languages save by some “circumlocution” or by the adding of words (362).

The translators’ final remark on their marginal notes concerns those notes in which they have made exegetical moves for sake of the readers’ understanding and application of certain passages. Once more, they address the hard places in the Scriptures:

> And considering how hard a thing it is to understand the Holy Scriptures, and what errors, sects and heresies grow daily for lack of the true knowledge thereof, and how many are discouraged (as they pretend) because they cannot attain to the true and simple meaning of the same, we have also endeavored both by the diligent reading of the best commentaries, and also by the conference with the godly and learned brethren, to gather brief annotations upon all the hard places, as well for the understanding of such words as are obscure, and for the declaration of the text, as for the application of the same as may most appertain to God’s glory and the edification of his Church. (362)

The translators couple their remarks on lexical integrity and stylistic propriety touching certain of the obscurer passages with similar remarks on the integrity and propriety of their interpretations. Their appeal to the “true and simple meaning” of the Scriptures resounds the ethical argument they made in the preceding passage concerning the “diversity of speech or reading.” Just as they
had limited the diversity of signification to those meanings “agreeable to the mind of the Holy Ghost,” their commentary limits readers’ exegetical license. The translators aim to ensure “right reading.”

The Prefatory Material to the King James Version:

The Authorized Version

92 In his book Managing Readers: Printed Marginalia in English Renaissance Books, William Slights analyzes the marginal glosses of several Bible translations contemporary with the Geneva translation. Slights concludes from his analysis that “Marginal annotators like those from Geneva were uneasy with a hermeneutic of indeterminacy” (115) and wrote such glosses to “fix certain senses of the text and rule out others” (114). Slights discovers in his comparative analysis of various mid-sixteenth-century English translations of the Babel story, for example, that

The Great Bible (1540) merely glosses “Babel”: “Confusyon.” The Matthew Bible (1537) “glosses the phrase, ‘the Lord came down,’ in an apparent attempt to contain excessive readings of the notion of immanence as actual incarnation:

God is counted to come downe, when he doth any thing in the erthe amonge men that is not accustomed to be done: in a maner shewynge hym selfe present amonge men by his wonderfull worke as it is in Psal xvii.b. and c.xliii.a.

The Geneva Bible glosses the motives of the tower builders so that readers don’t mistake the nature of the tower-builders’ sin: “They were mouded with pride and ambition, thinking to [have] preferred their own glorie to God’s honour” (margin Gen. 11:4). Matthew glosses God’s coming down to view the scene: “Meaning, that he declared by effect that he knewe their wicked enterprise: for Gods power is euerie where.” Geneva also glosses the phrase “let vs go downe” to remove the mystery of whom God was talking with by situating the conversation among the parts of the Trinity: “He speketh, as thogh he toke counsel with his owne wisdome and power: to wit, with the Sonne and the holy Gost: signifying the greatnes and certeintie of ye punishement” (margin Gen. 11:7). . . . While the marginators of the Bishops’ Bible (1568) were content to paraphrase the Geneva account of the tower-builders’ motives (“Here appeareth their willful pride, ambition, and contempt of God.”) and the three-sided conference in heaven (“An argument of the three persons in one Godhead.”), they read a different divine intention out of God’s coming down to see the city and tower, namely, mercifull hesitation before exacting punishment (“God seemed slowe in taking vengeance vpon the wicked.”) (111)

See Appendix A for a fuller comparative analysis of the Babel story, one that includes the full story as well as early-seventeenth-century English translations of the same passage in the Douay-Rheims and the Authorized Version.
Because the Geneva translators subdued their Calvinism in neither the text proper nor the marginal notes, the Geneva translation never really gained the foothold in the Anglican Church that the translators had hoped for. The “right reading” they advance in the Preface directs the reader, particularly in the marginal notes, to interpret the text in accord with Calvinist theology. With the death of Elizabeth and the ascension of James to the throne of England in 1603, the pressure for reform that had been building during the last decade of Elizabeth’s reign was finally given vent. Radical Protestants who had sought further reform of the Church beyond the reforms of the Elizabethan settlement awaited James’s ride south from Edinburgh to London with high hopes. Because James had been raised in the Scottish Presbyterian Church, English puritans thought they had a ruler sympathetic to their cause. Eager to be heard, several rode out and intercepted the procession, presenting James with the Millenary Petition, an oath supposedly bearing the signatures of a thousand clergy members swearing allegiance to the crown and their petition to James to redress clerical abuses in the Anglican Church under four heads: Church Service, Church Ministers, Church Livings and Maintenance, and Church Discipline. Of its many rhetorical purposes, the Millenary Petition served most as an outline of English puritan prop(ri)ety, or puritan piety through religious and civil propriety:

In the first section on “Church Service,” there were calls for No Popish opinion to be any more taught or defended: no ministers charged to teach their people to bow at the name of Jesus: that the canonical Scriptures only be read in the church. There were also objections . . . to wearing a wedding ring, making the sign of the cross, and wearing certain liturgical clothing.
In the section “Concerning Church Ministers,” [puritans] placed strong emphasis on ministers’ showing their ability to preach effectively and for those who couldn’t or wouldn’t to be dismissed and reprimanded. “Church Livings and Maintenance” dealt particularly with bishops and the practice of some to engage in double and triple dipping to augment their ecclesiastical income. “Church Discipline” included guidelines on the proper use of excommunication and recommendations for the abolishment of some of the arbitrary and inappropriate uses of canonical law. (Curtis 61)

James took the puritan clergy’s call for reform seriously and six months later called for a conference so that the grievances might be heard by “himself and [his] counsel, his bishops, and other learned men” (62). The original meeting time and place had to be moved, however, for London had been hit particularly hard by the plague. The conference was set for January the following year, 1604, at Hampton Court Palace.

At the Hampton Court Conference, the puritan delegation met a king and royal counsel set on maintaining the status quo. Four ministers, considered moderate among the radicals, represented puritan interests: “Dr. John Reynolds, head of Corpus Christi College, Oxford; Laurence Chaderton, a noted preacher and master of Emanuel College, Cambridge; John Knewstubs, rector of Cockfield in Suffolk; and Thomas Sparks, a relatively unknown preacher” (63). On the first day of the conference, January 14, 1604, the puritan delegation was not permitted to attend the proceedings, during which those in attendance discussed and settled such Church practices as baptism, absolution, and excommunication. The puritan representatives joined the meeting on the second day with John Reynolds speaking on behalf of the delegation. Anticipating James’s puritan sympathies, Reynolds moved to change the religious
establishment’s method of church governance, asking whether its administration might be broadened to include church members: “Why shouldn’t the bishops govern jointly with a presbyterie of their brethren the pastors and ministers of the Church?” (qtd. in Nicolson 56). Reynolds’s use of the word “presbyterie” moved James to consider no such change to Anglican Church governance; rather, it moved him to anger. He answered Reynolds directly: “If you aim at a Scots Presbytery, it agreeth as well with Monarchy as God and the Devil! Then Jack, and Tom, and Will, and Dick, shall meet and censure me and my council, and all our proceedings” (qtd. in Bobrick 212). James’s answer at once revealed his position on Puritanism in England and disclosed in no uncertain terms his view of religious and civil government. He distanced himself from puritans, saying that since his time in Scotland he had “lived among [them] and was kept for the most part as a Ward under them, yet, since he was ten years old, he ever disliked their opinions. James quoted the Savior of the world when he said, ‘Though he lived among them, he was not of them’” (qtd. in Bobrick 213). Now king, James deemed Puritanism a threat to both religious and civil order in England, exclaiming for a second time in response to Reynolds’ request for a presbytery the watchword that came to characterize his rule: “No bishop, no king!”

Reynolds could not move James to reconsider church government, but later that day he did move the king to consider a fresh translation of the Bible. Precisely where his first appeal had failed, his second appeal proved successful. James’s boyhood aversion toward Puritanism and later political aversion toward presbytery surfaced once again when he expressed his dislike of the Geneva translation, saying that he “could never yet see a Bible well translated in English; but the worst of all, his Majesty thought the Geneva to be” (qtd. in Nicolson 58). James took issue less with the translation than with the overt Calvinism he found contained in the commentary and interpretations of the Geneva translation’s marginalia. He deemed the marginal notes politically subversive and thus called for another translation of the Bible that rivaled the Geneva translators’
learning and scholarship, but corrected their theological (and political) errors. James urged that in this translation project, “Let errors in matters of faith be amended, and indifferent things be interpreted, and a gloss added unto them” (qtd. in Bobrick 216). The marginal glosses that would become part of the KJV would be less overtly Calvinist in doctrine and thus theologically (and politically) more moderate than the marginal glosses found in the Geneva translation, which is in part why the KJV came to gain a foothold in England where the Geneva translation had largely failed.

The theology James sought in the Authorized Version was an Anglican via media, neither papist nor puritan. He commanded the translators to retain words long used in the Anglican Church, like “bishop,” which comes from the Greek word *episkopos*, Gr. ἐπίσκοπος, meaning “one who watches over, an overseer, a guardian” (Liddell-Scott 301). The noun form of the Greek word translated as “bishop” comes from the verb *episkeptomai*, Gr. ἐπισκέπτομαι, meaning “to look upon, inspect, observe, examine, or regard” (Liddell-Scott 301). These words, and their cognates, appear in several places in the KJV New Testament. In its noun form, the Greek word *episkopos* appears roughly six times in the NT and gets translated as the office of the bishop, as in Philippians 1:1, “Paul and Timothy, the servants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons [Gr. συν ἐπίσκοποι καὶ διάκονοι, literally, “with the overseers and servants”]; as in I Timothy 3:1, in which Paul outlines the qualifications of the office of bishop, “This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop [Gr. ἐπίσκοπης, literally, “an overseer”], he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach;” or, again in Titus 1:7, “a bishop must be blameless as the steward of God” (KJV). In its verb form,

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93 The third of fifteen rules offered to direct the translators’ work was that “The Old Ecclesiastical Words to be kept, viz. the Word Church not to be translated Congregation &c” (qtd. in Curtis 67).
the Greek word *episkeptomai* appears in several places, several different senses of which appear in Acts, as in Acts 6:3 for example, “Wherefore, brethren, look ye out [Gr. ἐπισκέψασθε, literally, “consider” or “select”] among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;” or in Acts 7:23, “And when he was full forty years old, it came into his [Moses’s] heart to visit [Gr. ἐπισκέψασθαι, literally, “to come upon”] his brethren the children of Israel;” or in Acts 15:14, “Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit [Gr. ἐπισκέψατο, literally, “showed concern or regard for”] the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name” (KJV). Knowing well the king’s mind, as expressed in his now famous dictum “No bishop, no king!” the KJV translators translated several instances of the noun *episkopos* as “bishop.” Ironically, the 1560 edition of the Geneva Bible renders the same noun as “bishop” in all but one place, namely, Acts 1:20, in which the KJV replication of the Psalm “Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and, His bishopric let another take.” is rendered by the Geneva translators as “Let his habitation be void, and let no man dwell therein; also, Let another take his charge.” In all but this last passage the Geneva and KJV translators alike follow Tyndale’s translation of *episkopos* as “bishop.” In the Greek translation of the Hebrew Psalm, however, the Geneva translators part ways with Tyndale, who translates the passage, “His habitation be void, and no man be dwelling therein: and his bishoprycke let another take.” The Geneva translators choose to render the passage “his bishoprycke let another take” as “Let another take his charge,” and thus follow the meaning of the Greek much more closely.

Tyndale could not have foreseen the central role the bishops would play in the formation of the Anglican religious establishment and preservation of the status quo, particularly after the Elizabethan Religious Settlement of 1559. The Geneva translators had a better vantage point and very different motives from Tyndale for making subtle “leveling” changes in the text. In most
places, they followed Tyndale’s translation closely and focused their energies less on the word “bishop” than on the words that would effect change within the church from the bottom up.

Among other words, they translated *presbuteros* (Gr. πρεσβύτερος) more literally as “elder” than as “priest” and *ekklesia* (Gr. ἐκκλησία) as “congregation,” which is closer to the Greek meaning of “assembly” than the word “church.” The KJV translators also follow Tyndale very closely, especially in the New Testament, some accounts placing the number around 80% of the KJV text matching Tyndale’s nearly word for word (Edgar 2). James made his intentions clear to the translators that he wanted to preserve the Episcopal structure of the Established Church, concerning himself especially with words like *episkopos*, *presbuteros*, and *ekklesia*, which might be rendered more literally as “guardian,” “elder,” and “assembly”—the very arguments puritans and Presbyterians were leveling at the Anglican Church hierarchy. At issue was the lexical propriety of these words, as those studied in Greek and Hebrew returned to the source texts to contextualize and historicize meanings that had changed since the formation of the early church.

With an interest in maintaining the status quo established in the Elizabethan Religious Settlement of 1559, James directed the KJV translators to revise the Bishops’ Bible, requiring “The ordinary Bible, read in the church, commonly called the Bishops’ Bible, to be followed, and as little altered as the original will permit” (qtd. in Curtis 67). Though the translators would consult other English versions—namely, Tyndale’s, Coverdale’s, Matthew’s, Whitechurch, and Geneva—they would not depart from the Bishops’ unless one or more of these other versions “agree[d] better with the [Hebrew and Greek] text than the Bishops’ Bible” (qtd. in Curtis 67). In particular response to the Geneva translation, James also required the KJV translators to use discretion when translating more directly from the original tongues, advising the translators that “When any word hath divers significations, that to be kept which has been most commonly used by the most eminent fathers, being agreeable to the propriety of the place, and the analogy of
faith.” (qtd. in Curtis 67). Coupled with two more directives addressing the “propriety” of marginal annotations\(^{94}\), this directive assumes the internal consistency of the scriptural message. In places where the translators encounter words having “divers significations,” they were to refer to those meanings established by the early church fathers, whose proportion of faith renders their readings of such words more accurate.\(^ {95}\) The translators were also to refer to “the propriety of the place,” which means quite simply to read the passage in its immediate context. However, when coupled with the analogy of faith, the directive resounds the preaching manuals’ advice to ministers to attend to scriptural integrity.

Historically situated as it is between the appearance of the Geneva Bible translation in 1560 and the Authorized (King James) Version in 1611, Perkins’s preaching manual *The Art of Prophesying* largely treats the interpretive work of the preacher as an act of “translation.” By itself, writes Perkins, Scripture is sufficient to achieve the soul’s conviction and conversion, for “it stands complete in itself, without either deceit or error” (10). By this logic, all the Scriptures would need would be readers upon whom to work their effects. Perkins’s arguments are certainly in accord with the dual doctrine of *sola scriptura* and *sola fide*, for he allows for the power of the scriptural message to do its own work upon the individual soul and bring about the soul’s conviction and conversion; however, he also accounts for controversies within the church and the difficulties and dangers inherent in acts of translation and interpretation. Even as he argues for the

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\(^{94}\) These other two directives focus on the “fittingness” of the translators’ choices. The first is that “No marginal notes at all to be affixed, but only for the explanation of the Hebrew or Greek words, which cannot, without some circumlocution, so briefly and fitly be expressed in the text.” The second is that “Such quotations of places [are] to be marginally set down, as shall serve for the fit references of one Scripture to another” (qtd. in Curtis 67). James’s rules governing marginal annotation both argue for the internal consistency of the scriptural message, that certain passages require no marginal interpretation, save where the Hebrew and Greek does not lend itself to idiomatic English expressions, and that the only interpretive mechanism the translators should offer readers is intertextual references to other places in the Scriptures that contain doctrinally or theologically appropriate passages.

\(^{95}\) See chapter 1, specifically Augustine’s developing theory of proportions as the basis of his “aesthetical epistemology” and, after his conversion, the basis of his understanding of St. Paul’s “analogy of faith.”
internal consistency of the scriptural message, he acknowledges that the scriptural message must be “written in a language appropriate for the church” (10). Since men of the church are without the capacity to handle the immediate authority of the Holy Spirit, God, through mercy alone, allows His Word to be delivered to fallen men by fallen men. The preacher, seeing his own sin in the sinfulness of his congregation, shapes his message to meet the needs of his congregants. His “art” is to translate the Word of God into the language of men without losing the internal consistency of the scriptural message. Translating the Word of God, not unlike preaching and teaching the Word of God, is subject to some of the same errors as any interpretive act. James’s directives thus employ much of the same rhetoric to persuade the translators to translate difficult passages with an eye toward propriety: namely, to the authority of the church fathers, whose proportion of faith makes them the most fitting proprietors of meaning; to a passage’s place in the Scriptures, which argues for the Scriptures’ internal and intertextual consistency, specifically, their doctrinal and theological propriety; and finally, to the translators’ own faith, which should reflect that of the church fathers, especially given the importance of the translators’ charge, and which should be everywhere apparent in the choices they make in their translation. Still, like Perkins, who acknowledged that ministers are merely fallen men delivering God’s Word to other fallen men and so interpret the Scriptures “in a language appropriate for the church” (10), James implemented a system of “checks and balances” that would ensure the integrity of the translation by diffusing authority among several companies of translators.

First among these checks and balances is that “Every particular Man of each Company, [is] to take the same Chapter or Chapters, and having translated or amended them severally by himself, where he thinketh good, all to meet together, confer what they have done, and agree for their Parts what shall stand.” Second, that “As any one Company hath dispatched any one Book in this Manner they shall send it to the rest, to be considered of seriously and judiciously, for His
Majesty is very careful in this Point.” Third, that “If any Company, upon the Review of the Book so sent, doubt or differ upon any Place, to send them Word thereof; note the Place, and withal send the Reasons, to which if they consent not, the Difference to be compounded at the general Meeting, which is to be of the chief Persons of each Company, at the end of the Work.” Fourth, that “When any Place of special Obscurity is doubted of, Letters to be directed by Authority, to send to any Learned Man in the Land, for his Judgement of such a Place.” Fifth, that “Letters to be sent from every Bishop to the rest of his Clergy, admonishing them of this Translation in hand; and to move and charge as many skilful in the Tongues; and having taken pains in that kind, to send his particular Observations to the Company, either at Westminster, Cambridge, or Oxford.” Sixth, that “The Directors in each Company, to be the Deans of Westminster, and Chester for that Place; and the King's Professors in the Hebrew or Greek in either University.” And, finally, that “Besides the said Directors before mentioned, three or four of the most Ancient and Grave Divines, in either of the Universities, not employed in Translating, to be assigned by the vice-Chancellor, upon Conference with the rest of the Heads, to be Overseers of the Translations as well Hebrew as Greek, for the better observation of the 4th Rule above specified,” namely, that “When a Word hath divers Significations, that to be kept which hath been most commonly used by the most of the Ancient Fathers, being agreeable to the Propriety of the Place, and the Analogy of the Faith.” The arrangement of these rules is such that James first addresses the propriety of the translation and then the integrity of the translators. Ensuring the integrity of the project is his diffusion of authority among different companies of translators who would check one another’s work. He even extends authority to “any learned man in the land” to judge of the more doubtful places in the Scriptures. However, ultimate authority and propriety rests with the bishops, the vice-chancellor, and the king himself, who will “oversee” the entire project from beginning to
In this way, James’s rules progress from stylistic propriety in addressing the methods of translation, to rhetorical propriety in addressing the translation companies’ methods for approving or revising the translation, to social and economic propriety in addressing who would oversee and endorse the translation. The rules governing both the translation project and the translation itself thus reflect James and the Anglican Establishment’s belief in a divinely-ordained, hierarchically-structured clergy.

The rhetoric of the “Epistle Dedicatory” argues for the propriety of the translation project not merely because James patronized the project, but also because this more exact translation of the Scriptures has shown the nation “which way to walk.” A favorite metaphor of St. Augustine to describe his conversion experience in the *Confessions*, the KJV translators offer the metaphor of “walking in the right direction” or “walking on the right path” to describe the religious confidence that James brought to England after the confusion of Elizabeth’s death. Elizabeth’s death threatened national discord, but James’s ascension secured peace in the realm. The translators write,

> For whereas it was the expectation of many, who wished not well unto our Zion, that upon the setting of that bright occidental star, Queen Elizabeth of most happy memory, some thick and palpable clouds of darkness would so have overshadowed this land that men should have been in doubt which way they were to walk, and that it should hardly be known who was to direct the unsettled state; the appearance of your Majesty, as of the sun in his strength, instantly dispelled those supposed and surmised mists and gave unto all that were well affected

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90 It is entirely appropriate that the rules refer to “three or four of the most Ancient and Grave Divines” as “Overseers,” for the Greek word *episkopos*, which the KJV translators everywhere translated as “bishop,” literally means “overseer.”
With his settling of the political state, James brings perfect clarity to the realm and disperses the “thick and palpable clouds of darkness [that] would so have overshadowed [the] land that men should have been in doubt which way they were to walk.” The question of who would fill the power vacuum after Elizabeth’s death and who could establish him- or herself in the proper line of succession was for the translators and the English people a political question, to be sure, but a political question saturated with religious concerns.

In the preceding passage the translators name the English nation “our Zion,” in which they conflate the political and religious destiny of the English people. As the argument of the “Epistle Dedicatory” develops, the political concerns of the preceding passage open to religious concerns later in the letter, concerns which appear to hinge on the metaphor “which way to walk.” If the way in which the translators have arranged their argument does not place the political concerns alongside the religious concerns, then the metaphor brings cohesion to these passages: James’s succession lighted the way and dispersed any political doubt the people might be harboring as to which way they were to walk. Now, the publication of the KJV disperses any lingering religious doubt as to which way the people are to walk. For, of the “infinite arguments of [the English people’s] right Christian and religious affection in Your Majesty,” write the translators, “none is more forcible to declare it to others than the vehement and perpetual desire of accomplishing and publishing….one more exact translation of the Holy Scriptures into the English tongue” (Bray 415). The translators commend James perspicuity and tenacity in seeing
the project through to its completion “not only as . . . our King and Sovereign, but as . . . the principle mover and author of the work” (415).

Because James commissioned the work, he is its principle author. His rules of translation ensured the propriety of the translation, and he will now stand over all as the work’s proprietor. That the KJV comes to be called the “Authorized” Version is significant in terms of its propriety, for just as the translators “have great hopes that the Church of England shall reap good fruit thereby” (415), they also know that James has bolstered his political power with the work’s publication. If any readers should still doubt “which way to walk” near the end of the “Epistle Dedicatory,” the translators clear the way by shouldering the politically dubious to one side and the religiously hopeful to the other, both groups being likely “calumniators” of the translation project:

So that if, on the one side, we shall be traduced by popish persons at home or abroad, who therefore will malign us, because we are poor instruments to make God’s holy truth to be yet more and more known unto the people, whom they desire still to keep in ignorance and darkness; or if, on the other side, we shall be maligned by selfconceited [sic] brethren, who run their own ways, and give liking unto nothing, but what is framed by themselves, and hammered on their anvil we may rest secure, supported within by the truth and innocency of a good conscience, having walked the ways of simplicity and integrity, as before the Lord . . . . (416)

The translators close their epistle with the same metaphor with which they open it. The Anglican way is the right and proper way to walk before the Lord, both the Lord King and the Lord God,
both politically and religiously. Their “more exact” translation achieves the perspicuity and
propriety necessary to preserve Anglicanism in England.

The translators’ preface, “The Translators to the Reader,” offers much the same rhetoric
as the “Epistle Dedicatory,” yet the preface develops the epistle’s arguments with historical,
patristic, and scriptural warrants. The translators marshal various arguments to defend their
project, so that the preface reads much like an apology. In the opening section, “The best things
have been calumniated,” the translators address the “cavilers” who suspect the “revising [of] that
which hath been laboured by others” (416). That such a defense would be needed in the
Renaissance is indeed surprising, for it was an age in which authors and artists were reinventing,
innovating, and adapting ancient cultural materials to novel cultural ends. Nevertheless, the
translators echo the concerns of the secular authors, who also attended to the propriety of their
writings in that they aimed to be close enough to their originals for audience recognition, but
carefully distanced their work so as to seem innovative. The translators thus cite the unfounded
suspicion of their contemporaries against innovation, which, they write, “will easily be granted by
as many as know history, or have any experience. For, was there ever anything projected, that
savoured any way of newness or renewing, but the same endured many a storm of gain-saying, or
opposition?” (416). The translators’ argument is all the more forceful because they want to
distance themselves as much as possible from the secular innovators, who innovate to make a
name for themselves.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ See, for example, Richard Helgerson’s Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton and the
Literary System. In the vein of Greenblatt’s Renaissance Self-Fashioning, Helgerson argues that early
modern English poet laureates fashioned themselves in opposition to the surrounding culture. Helgerson
revises Greenblatt’s thesis slightly, however, arguing that Spenser, Jonson, and Milton wrote for “self-
preservation” rather than “self-fashioning.” Each of these writers, says Helgerson, can all be characterized
as having some relationship to the court or government in a time when the patronage system began to
change in England. To negotiate their uncertain place as writers, these poets all tried to carve out a place for
themselves as laureates within the English literary tradition as each had inherited it in his time: Spenser, as
To revise translations of the Scriptures, to which people have grown accustomed, is as the translators admit, to threaten these people’s way of life: “For he that meddleth with men’s religion in any part, meddleth with their custom, nay, with their freehold; and though they find no content in that which they have, yet they cannot abide to hear of altering” (419). The translators admit that their revision of the Scriptures has the power to revise custom, which is the very basis of legal and political relations. By their conflation of “religion” with “custom,” and “custom” with “freehold,” the translators at once recognize that readers’ religion is their personal property—much like a parcel of land that is owned “fee simple”—but personal property that is subject to the dictates of the monarch and the laws of the state. Because the translators have their appointment by the monarch, they represent the state when they write, directly following their conflation of religion with custom and custom with freehold, that

Notwithstanding his royal heart was not daunted or discouraged for this or that colour, but stood resolute . . . [that] he would not suffer [his intended course] to

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a late Elizabethan poet; Jonson, as an early Jacobean poet; and Milton, as a late Jacobean poet whose prose and poetry anticipates the realization of the English Republic and the millennial rule of Christ on earth. What set each poet apart from his contemporaries was a tension that he felt he had to negotiate in his poetic development. For Spenser, the tension arose between the inherited roles of poet and *vates* (i.e. prophet), which Helgerson characterizes as a tension between the subject position of the private shepherd and the public, questing knight, with all the qualities contained by these roles in classical Roman literature and medieval romance. For Jonson, that tension arose from his implication within, and later transcendence of, the stage-play world of his contemporaries, which Helgerson claims he could never achieve by criticizing the artlessness of other playwrights, such as Shakespeare; and also by Jonson’s insistent self-presentation in his writing, particularly in the prologues and epilogues to his plays, which made his physical presence (earthbound because corpulent—which he also wanted to transcend) all the more fixed. Finally, for Milton, that tension was the failure of his political and religious project, which, Helgerson argues, made him turn all the more drastically toward his Puritan vocation as poet-prophet in exile, speaking no longer within society but rather from its margins. Whereas the cavalier poets appropriated the literary tradition that they inherited from the preceding generation, Milton enriched it, making his poetry (particularly his later poetry) timeless in Helgerson’s opinion. Milton redefined what it meant to be a poet laureate, given the changing political circumstances in which he wrote his later poetry, for he presented himself not in relation to his predecessors, nor in relation to the king (as the cavalier poets had done), but rather presented himself as a late-comer whose own powers made him a national poet. Milton’s sense of selfhood is marked more than any other writer during the period. As a Puritan he replaced the exigencies of both king and tradition with the transcendent exigency of God’s call: the Puritan “vocation.” Helgerson thus emphasizes the dialectical tensions between “self-fashioning” and “self-preservation” by contrasting authority that results from, on the one hand, secular innovation and, on the other hand, sacred initiation.
be broken off for whatsoever speeches or practices. [For] it doth certainly belong unto Kings, yea, it doth specially belong unto them, to have care of religion, yea, to know it aright, yea, to profess it zealously, yea, to promote it to the uttermost of their power. (419)

Admitting elsewhere in this section of their preface that “in some Commonwealths it was made a capital crime, once to motion the making of a new law for the abrogating of an old, though the same were most pernicious” (417), the translators suggest, using the same metaphor of economic propriety, that the readers’ ownership of their religious estate is limited, even superseded, by the power of the monarch. To trace the metaphor to its logical conclusion, then, the monarch, in effect, possesses the exclusive power to declare “eminent domain” on readers’ “freeholds” or religious estates if it be for the common good. Though after James’s death, the English people would prove by the execution of his son, Charles I, that it was a “capital” crime to abrogate their religious estates, James would weave politics and religion so closely together in the Commonwealth that there would be little room for the English people to question his authority as the religio-political “head” of both Church and realm.

With James at the head of both Church and realm, the translators show that, coupled with the basic Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura et sola fide*, the translation the king has “authorized” to be read in the Church will come to serve as Anglicans’ means of salvation. In the spiritual economy of the Anglican Church, the king is sole proprietor, and his actions are answerable only to God. His place as sole proprietor in the spiritual economy backs his prerogatives in the political economy of the England and its realms. Having thus laid out their arguments concerning the economic propriety of their translation, the translators proceed to treat its rhetorical propriety, touching first the “rhetoric” of the Scriptures unmediated by any
translation or interpretation. “It doth certainly belong unto Kings,” write the translators, “yea, it
doth specially belong unto them, to have a care of religion” and promote piety across their realms.
Their promotion of piety, or “prop(ri)ety,” gets its direction from the Scriptures, however, but if
the Scriptures be misunderstood, what does that say about those proclaiming and promoting
piety? The translators trace this line of thinking: “But now what piety without truth? What truth
(what saving truth) without the Word of God? What Word of God (whereof we may be sure)
without the Scripture?” (419). The Scriptures are men’s only means of salvation and assurance,
written in a language appropriate to their spiritual conditions. Among other patristic sources, the
translators cite Augustine’s conversion experience in his Confessions, when the supernatural
voice spoke to him and said

_Tolle, lege; Tolle, lege, Take up and read, take up and read the Scriptures, (for
unto them was the direction) . . . Whatsoever is in the Scriptures, believe me,
saith the same St Augustine, is high and divine; there is verily truth and a
doctrine most fit for the refreshing and renewing of men’s minds, and truly so
tempered that everyone may draw from thence that which is sufficient for him, if
he come to draw with a devout and pious mind, as true religion requireth. (419)

By the Scriptures alone do readers understand and listeners hear truths “most fit” and “truly so
tempered” to address their individual spiritual conditions. Nothing should be added and nothing
redacted that is not already written in the languages the Holy Spirit deemed “fittest to contain the
Scriptures” (422) for the dissemination of God’s Word.

The translators point out, however, that the rhetorical situation of the Scriptures
themselves changed when Hebrew alone grew insufficient to speak to God’s chosen people and
“the fulness of time drew near that . . . God ordained [His Son] to be a reconciliation through faith
in his blood, not of the Jews only, but also of the Greek, yea, of all them that were scattered abroad” (422). The Hebrew Scriptures needed to be translated into Greek, and so God thought it appropriate to stir the spirit of Ptolemy Philadelphus, King of Egypt, to commission a Greek translation of Hebrew Scriptures. “This is the translation of the seventy interpreters,” explain the KJV translators, “commonly so called (i.e. the Septuagint), which prepared the way for our Saviour among the Gentiles by written preaching, as Saint John Baptist did among the Jews by vocal” (422). The translators’ own historical circumstances and rhetorical situation so closely mirror that of the Gentiles that they cite the history of the Scriptures to support their translation. They see James as a modern Ptolemy and their translation project as “written preaching,” writing in their “Epistle Dedicatory” that “among all [their] joys” at the ascension of James to the throne of England, “there was no one more filled [their] hearts, than the blessed continuance of the preaching of God’s sacred Word among [them]” (414), and that their translation would see to it that that preaching would bear fruit for the Anglican Church (415).

Precisely because the KJV translators admit in the “Epistle Dedicatory” that it was their goal to produce “one more exact translation of the Holy Scriptures into the English tongue” (415), they defend their translation in the preface against criticism on several heads from their scrupulous brethren on the one side and from popish detractors on the other. In “A satisfaction to our brethren,” the translators address the puritan objection that the translators’ “more exact translation” really aims to be the “last translation.” The translators answer the question of their brethren, “Was their translation good before? Why do they now mend it? Was it not good?” (426). First, the translators argue that

nothing is begun and perfected at the same time, and the later thoughts are thought to be the wiser: so if we building upon their foundation that went before
us, and being holpen by their labors, do endeavor to make that better which they left so good; no man, we are sure, hath cause to mislike us; they, we persuade ourselves, if they were alive, would thank us. (427)

The translators at once appeal to the authority of precedent—that they are indeed “standing on the shoulders of giants”—and yet they also recognize that those skilled in the Greek and Hebrew have increased in number, as have the source texts and commentaries which they can compare. The translators have the “long view of history” to produce a more exact and becoming translation, that “if anything be halting, or superfluous, or not so agreeable to the original, the same may be corrected, and the truth set in place” (427). If nothing else, continue the translators, the puritans’ scrupulosity has been met.

The translators likewise defend the propriety of their translation in “An answer to the imputations of our adversaries,” the Catholics. Catholics advanced their objections to the translation on several heads: 1. that various translations cannot all hold equal authority; 2. that translations not authorized by the Catholic Church are heretical; 3. that corrections to existing translations question the authority of the translation and competing texts fracture the Church. To answer to the first objection, the translators make the case that even the “meanest” translation of the Word of God is still the Word of God, no matter how stylistically ungainly its lines may appear:

[W]e do not deny, nay we affirm and avow, that the very meanest translation of the Bible in English, set forth by men of our profession (for we have seen none of theirs of the whole Bible as yet) containeth the Word of God, nay, is the Word of God. As the King’s speech which he uttered in Parliament, being translated into French, Dutch, Italian, and Latin, is still the King’s speech, though it be not
The translators’ analogy explicitly states that extant Anglican translations of the Bible all amount to God’s Word, but it implies that their own translation carries the added weight of stylistic propriety; or rather to state the case more accurately, as the translators do themselves when they later treat the stylistic propriety of their translation, the KJV “Englishes” in as fitting of phrase and expressive of sense as one can render the directness of the Hebrew and the gracefulness of the Greek.

To the second objection, that extant English Bibles were authored by heretics, the translators respond that the Catholic Church has turned the very question on its head: As Tertullian wrote, “Ex personis probamus fidelis, an ex fide personas?” So we try men’s faith by their person? We should try their persons by their faith” (429). The translators offer Tertullian, and later Origen, as two early Church fathers who “were so far from treading under foot, (much more from burning)” (429) translations that would spread the Word of God. In his famous separation of Athens from Jerusalem, of philosophy from religion, Tertullian asks “What has the Academy to do with the Church?” (“Heretics” 166). The KJV translators are not following the “anti-intellectualism” so often associated with Tertullian, but once more appealing to the circumstances of the early Church to suggest that its circumstances mirror their own. They too merely aim to disseminate the Word of God among those unlearned in the original tongues, to undo the very ignorance of the Scriptures the Catholic Church had, in the translators’ eyes, labored to maintain. As for too often correcting extant English translations, the translators reply, “let us see therefore whether they [Catholics] themselves be without fault this way, (if it be to be counted a fault, to correct) and whether they be fit men to throw stones at us” (Bray 430). To
answer whether correction be a fault, the translators appeal directly to the Scriptures, saying that if the Old Law had been sufficient, as the Apostle Paul had reasoned, there would be no need for its fulfillment in the New. To answer whether it is right for Catholics to criticize the corrections, the translators offer a simple rhetorical question: “doth not their Paris edition differ from the Louvain, and Hentenius, his from them both, and yet all of them allowed by authority?” (431). Catholics cannot with reason or with fairness fault the KJV translators with correction. The KJV translators use this final appeal to clarity and propriety not just to conclude their response to their popish adversaries about the rhetorical propriety of their translation, but also to open their explanation of the text’s stylistic propriety to the “good Christian reader” (431).

The final three sections of the preface all address the translators’ stylistic choices. In the first, “The purpose of the translators, with their number, furniture, care, etc.,” the translators make a case for their authority to translate to smooth the transition from their treatment of rhetorical propriety to their treatment of stylistic propriety. They repeat that it was never their intent to make a new translation, “nor yet to make of a bad one a good one,” but rather “to make a good one better or out of many good ones, one principal good one, not justly to be excepted against” (431-32). With numerous translations and commentaries at their disposal, God has position them at a felicitous moment in history. Add to their historical situation the fact that the translators chosen for the project came to it “not exercendi causa . . . but exercitati, that is, learned, not to learn” (432). The translators have few, if any, peers in the history of England who can rival their learning in Greek and Hebrew. Add, finally, that the KJV translators took much more time (and care) to produce their translation than that recorded by their predecessors, and the first section thus closes with three slightly different rhetorical appeals to the kairotic propriety of the translation project.
In the second section, “Reasons moving us to set diversity of senses in the margin, where
there is great probability for each,” the translators argue not merely for the KJV’s paucity of
marginal annotation compared to their brethren’s Geneva translation and the Catholics’ Douay-
Rheims translation, but also to make a case for the readers’ practice of “prudent” reading. Unlike
the Geneva and Douay-Rheims translations, which aim to fix meaning, but in very different ways,
the KJV positions readers to exercise their interpretive judgment, which is very much a part of
Protestant piety. As the translators point out in the “Epistle Dedicatory” and, once more, here in
the preface, the KJV translation steers an Anglican via media between the scrupulous doctrinal,
historical, and philological marginalia of Geneva and the obscuring tedium of Douay-Rheims’
marginalia and endnotes, which tend to detract readers’ attention from the text proper. The KJV
translators support the few marginal notes they do in fact provide mainly where the meaning of
the text is uncertain, admitting that there “be many words in the Scriptures, which be never found
there but once, (having neither brother nor neighbour, as the Hebrews speak) so that we cannot be
holpen by conference of places” (433). In other words, when the preachers’ exegetical strategy of
comparing the “propriety of place” to determine a word or passage’s meaning fails, the translators
have added a marginal note to facilitate the reader’s interpretation. However, in places where the
text is difficult but may become clearer as the reader persists, the translators do not offer any
marginal notes, following the Augustine’s teachings on this point:

In those things that are plainly set down in the Scriptures all such matters are
found that concern faith, hope and charity. Yet for all that it cannot be
dissembled, that partly to exercise and whet our wits, partly to wean the curious
from loathing of them for their everywhere-plainness, partly also to stir up our
devotion to crave the assistance of God’s Spirit by prayer, and lastly, that we

98 See Appendix A for examples.
might be forward to seek aid of our brethren by conference, and never scorn
those that be not in all respects so complete as they should be, being to seek in
many things ourselves, it hath pleased God in his divine providence, here and
there to scatter words and sentences of that difficulty and doubtfulness, not in
doctrinal points that concern salvation (for in such it hath been vouched that the
Scriptures are plain) but in matters of less moment, that fearfulness would better
beseeem us than confidence. . . . (433)

To every reader the Scriptures pay his proper due. Nevertheless, the translators know that
translation is itself an interpretive act, and so offer in the margins different passages and lexical
variations to compare with the obscurer passages. To explain this choice, the translators again
offer Augustine: “Therefore as Saint Augustine saith, that variety of translations is profitable for
the finding out of the sense of the Scriptures: so diversity of signification and sense in the margin,
when the text is not so clear, must needs do good, yea, is necessary as we are persuaded” (434).
The good the KJV translators have in mind, contrary to their puritan and popish contemporaries,
is the freedom of the “wise” reader to exercise his interpretive judgment: “They that are wise,”
write the translators, “had rather have their judgements at liberty in differences of readings, then
to be captivated to one, when it may be the other” (434). This appeal to the “prudence” of the
reader of course assumes the “propriety” of his reading practices, or else he would not be
considered “wise.”99 Not to mention that the translators themselves control the “diversity” of
signification, so that only those learned in Hebrew and Greek are accounted “wise.”

Kahn argues that rhetoric largely shaped humanist reading practices during the Renaissance. In the
humanists’ program of education, students were trained according to the Ciceronian method of arguing in
utramque partem (on both sides of a case) and thus learned to suspend judgment, a suspension of belief
which Kahn calls “skepticism.” Though Kahn does not treat humanists’ readings of the Scriptures at any
In the final section of the preface, titled “Reasons inducing us not to stand curiously upon an identity of phrasing,” the translators address the finer points of their translation style. Again they appeal to the unique eloquence of the Scriptures, but this time to its style, not its rhetoric—inasmuch as style can be analyzed in isolation from rhetoric. Like the Scriptures’ rhetoric, which speak to readers’ various spiritual conditions, and do so very often in one and the same passage, the translators have endeavored to let the Scriptures speak on their own terms and in their own style.

Add hereunto, that niceness in words was always counted the next step to trifling, and so was to be curious about names too: also that we cannot follow a better pattern for elocution than God himself; therefore he using divers words, in His Holy Writ, and indifferently for one thing in nature: we, if we will not be superstitious, may use the same liberty in our English versions out of Hebrew and Greek, for that copy or store that he hath given us. (435)

The “superstition” the translators wish to avoid is, on the one hand, following the letter of the text too closely and becoming convicted more by the words of the text than its meaning. On the other hand, they wish not to depart too far from the text in their attempt to capture its “spirit” and risk obscuring the literal meaning the words were intended to convey.

This is not merely the KJV translators’ dilemma, but every translator’s dilemma. The KJV translators’ dilemma is further compounded by the ancient theological debate over the “letter” versus the “spirit,” a debate in which an Anglican takes no clear side. As the translators repeat one last time in their preface,
We have on the one side avoided the scrupulosity of the Puritans, who leave the old ecclesiastical words, and betake them to other, as when they put washing for baptism, and congregation instead of church: as also on the other side, we have shunned the obscurity of the papists, in their azymes, tunic, rational, holocausts, prepuce, Pasche, and a number of such like, whereof their late [Rheims] translation is full, and that of purpose to darken the sense, that since they must needs translate the Bible, yet by the language thereof, it may be kept from being understood. (435)

The KJV translators endeavored instead to write in “the language of Canaan, that it may be understood even of the very vulgar” (435). To achieve such clarity in their diction, however, they sought the “felicitous middle,” attending to the sense or “spirit” of the text, though not adhering too closely to its words or “letter.” The closest the KJV translators ever get in their preface to stating a unified theory of translation that resembles that of the ancients, like Cicero and Horace, or that of near contemporaries, like Dolet, Du Bellay, and Chapman, is when in this final section they pose the following rhetorical questions: “[I]s the kingdom of God become [merely] words or syllables? Why should we be in bondage to them if we may be free, use one precisely when we may use another no less fit, as commodiously?” (434-35). If, as the KJV translators write, “Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in he light,” theirs is a translation that shuns the obscurity of the papists. And yet, their opening of the Scriptures also shuns puritans’ scrupulosity. The Anglican middle, like the Aristotelian mean, assumes that its practitioners know something of propriety, and that they prefer prudence to mere precision.101

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100 My emphasis.
101 In his Rhetoric, Aristotle names two stylistic principles the rhetor must obey if he is to appear eloquent to his audience: clarity and propriety. Without clarity, the audience loses the speech’s substance. Without
Aristotle’s famous definition of rhetoric as “an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion” (1355a1) implies a rhetor who has a keen sense of propriety and the language skills to capitalize on it. The rhetor’s sense of propriety depends on his recognition of the causes, times, opportunities, and necessities that form his speaking situation and his ability to shape his speech to fit these circumstances. It is this “contingent” quality of the speaking situation and the many choices the speaking situation presents to the rhetor that also interests Aristotle in both his *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*. The rhetor may “capitalize” on any one of the opportunities with which his speaking situation presents him, which becomes a question of ethics for Aristotle. A rhetor can certainly put his persuasive faculties to wicked ends; however, the “prudent” rhetor—a person gifted with the virtue of practical wisdom—deliberates on his speaking situation only to choose the most proper course of action. Implied in the classical stylistic principle of rhetorical propriety, then, is not only virtuous speech (good style), but also a virtuous rhetor (a good man). In the rhetoric of Anglicanism, “prudence” is akin to “godliness.”


Appendix A

The following is a comparative analysis of several mid-sixteenth and early-seventeenth-century English translations of, and the translators’ glosses on, Genesis 11:1-9:

**Geneva (1560)**

1. Then the whole earth was of one language and one speache.
2. And (a) as (b) they went from the (c) East, they found a plaine in the land of (d) Shinar, and there they abode.
3. And they said one to another, Come let us make bricke, and burne it in the fire. So they had bricke for stone, and slyme had they in steade of morter.
4. And they said, Go to, let us (e) builde us a citie and a tower, whose top [may reache] unto the heauen, that we may get us a name, lest we be scattered upon the whole earth.
5. But the (f) Lorde came downe, to see the citie and tower, which the sonnes of men builded.
6. And the Lord said, (g) Beholde, the people [is] one, and they all haue one language, and this they begin to do, neither can they nowe be stopped from whateuer they have imagined to do.
7. Come on, (h) let us goe downe, and (i) there confounde their language, that ery one perceiue not anothers speech.
8. So the Lord scattered them from thence upon all the earth, and they left of to build the citie.
9. Therefore the name of it was called (l) Babel, because the Lorde did there confound the language of all the earth: from thence then did the Lorde scatter them upon all the earth.
Marginal notes: Wisd. 10.5. (a) In the yere of **nimbreth** and thence after the flood. (b) To wit, Nimrod and his companie. (c) That is, from Armenia, where the Arke staved. (d) Which was afterward called Caldea. (e) They were moued with pride and ambition, thinking to preferre their owne glorie to Gods honour. (f) Meaning, that he declared by effect that he knewe their wicked enterprise: for Gods power is every where, and doeth neither ascende nor descend. (g) They were moued with pride and ambition, thinking to preferre their owne glorie to Gods honour. (f) Meaning, that he declared by effect that he knewe their wicked enterprise: for Gods power is every where, and doeth neither ascende nor descend. (g) God speaketh this in derision, because of their foolish persuasion and enterprise. (h) He speaketh, as though he tooke counsel with his owne wisedome and power: to wit, with the sonne, and the holy Ghost: signifying the greatnes and certaintie of the punishment. (i) By this great plague of the confusion of tongues, appeareth Gods horrible iudgement against mans pride and uaine glorie. (l) Or, confusion.

**Bishops’ Bible (1568)**

1 And all the whole earth (a) was of one language and like speache.

2 And when (b) they went foorth from the east, they founde a playne in the lande of Sinar, and there they abode.

3 And “one sayde to another: Come, let vs prepare bryccke, and burne them in the fyre. And they had bricke for stones, and slyme had they in stead of morter.

4 And they sayde: Go to, let vs buylde vs a citie and a towre, whose top may reache vnto heauen, and let vs make vs a name, lest peraduenture we be scattered abrode vpon the whole earth.

5 But the Lorde (c) came downe to see the citie and towre whiche the children of men buylded.
6 And the Lorde sayd, Beholde, (d) the people is one, and they haue all one language: and this they begin to do, neither is there any let to them from all those thynges which they haue imagined to do.

7 Come one, let vs go downe, and there confounde theyr language, that euerye one perceauze not his neighbours speache.

8 And so the Lorde scattered them from that place vpon all the earth: and they left of to buylde that citie.

9 And therefore is the name of it called Babel, because the Lord did there confounde the language of all the earth: and from thence dyd the Lorde scatter them abroade vpon the face of all the earth.

Marginal notes: (a) This vnitie continued a hundred yeres. (b) Nimrod and his posteretie, inuadeth other mens possessions. “ Hebr. man sayde to his neighbour. (c) Whereby he declareth by the effect that he knewe theyr wicked enterprises by punishing the same. (d) God speaketh this in derision because of their foolyshe perswasion and enterpyse.

Douay-Rheims (1582 NT/1609-10 2 vols. of OT)

1 And the earth was of one tong, and al one speach.

2 And when they remoued from the east, they found a plaine in the land of Sennaar, and dwelt one it.

3 And each one said to his neighbour: Come, let vs make brick, and bake them with fire. And they had brick instead of stone, and bitumen instead of mortar:

4 and they said, Come, let vs make vs a citie and a towre, the topic whereof may reach to heauen: and let vs make renowne our name before we be dispersed into al lands.
And our Lord descended to see the citie and the towre, which the children of Adam
builded,

and he said: Behold, it is one people, and one tong is to al: and they have begun to doe
this, neyther wil they leaue off from their determinations, til they accomplish them
indeed.

Come yee therefore, let vs goe downe, and there confound their tong, that none may
heare his neighbours voice.

And so our Lord dispersed them from that place into al lands, and they ceased to build the
citie.

And therefore the name thereof was called Babel, (a) because there the tong of the whole
earth was confounded and from thence our Lord dispersed them vpon the face of al
countries.

Marginal notes: (a) He that speaketh so confusedly that he is not vnderstood is said to bable.

End notes: 4. Let vs make. ) Here we may see in Nemrod the common causes of heresies, and the
manner of Heretikes proceeding. For he having a subtile, proud, and aspiring mind, first detracted
from God, persuading men (as is noted before) not to depend on Gods prouidence, and finding
some others of like humour, they conspired together, and drew more followers, by bearing the
simpler sort in hand (for it was vnprofitible wise men should believe it) that they would make a
towre of defence against a new floud, if God should thinke to drowne the world againe. But their
principle intention was to make themselues great and strong for the present, and famous to
posteritie. Al which God ouerthrew, neither suffering them to build vp their imagined castle of
strength, nor to be praised for their worke, but made them infamous to the worlds end.
7. Let vs confound. ) God in dissipating this vaine worke of men, would vse the ministerie of Angels. As not only Philo Iudaeus, and Origen, but also S. Augustine, S. Gregorie, and other fathers expound these words, *Come, let vs descend and confound their tongue*. Where they also note Gods singular wisdome, mercie, and iustice, so punishing the offence, that he turneth it to his owne glorie, and the profit of al men: shewing his power and souueraigne Maiestie by two great miracles. First, by so suddainly and vtterly depriuing al these builders of their vsual tongue, that presently they could neither speake it, nor vnderstand it. Secondly, by giuing diuers distinct languages to seueral sorts or families, which they immediately vnderstood, and spoke most promptly, as if they had long before learned and vsed the same. But to no man was giuen more then one language. And so, to the more commoditie of al mankind, they were forced to part into sundrie coasts of the earth, which they inhabited and replenished with distinct Nations. Hauing the same Angels their spiritual Patrones and Protectours, which had seuerally changed their language. In particular, it was profitable to the good, who being before oppressed by the united power of the manie wicked, were relieued (as S. Gregorie teacheth) when their persecutours were diuided. These good were the familie of Heber, as S. Chrisostom and S. Augustin proue. For seeing the change of tongues was inflicted for punishment, it appeareth than Heber and his familie were innocent of the vaine attempt, whose tongue was not changed, but remained the same, and of him was called the Hebrew tongue for distinction sake after there were manie tongues, which before had no distinct name, being the only tongue of al men. Againe, touching the offenders, who were punished in their tongues, that they could not be vnderstood
commanding one another, because they would not understand God justly commanding them al)

they also reaped this profit, that they were forced to leave off that bad worke, and withal to seeke
more ample habitations, who If they had there more increased in number and strength, would
without doubt (saith S. Chrisostom) have attempted worse things. And infinit man-slaughter
would haue been committed amongst so manie, for possession of that one citie and towre. Finally
the fathers note, that as God wrought here much good by diuision of the tongues, so he wrought
much more by communion of tongues giuen to the Apostles, therby inabling them to gather one
Church of all tongues and Nations.

Left-hand marginal notes: several scriptural cross-references.

Right-hand marginal notes: God turneth the offence of men to good. Two miracles, in
priuation of one tongue, & giving of a new. Division among evil men is profitable. The
member offending is punished. Heber and his family consented not to the building of
Babel.

**Authorized Version (1611)**

1 And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.

2 And it came to passe, as they journeyed from the East, that they found a plaine in the land
of Shinar, and they dwelt there.

3 And they sayd one to another; Goe to, let vs make bricke, and burne them thorowly.
   And they had bricke for stone, and slime had they for morter.

4 And they said; Goe to, let vs build vs a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto
   heauen, and let vs make vs a name, lest we be scattered abroad vpon the face of the whole
earth.
And the LORD came downe to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.

And the LORD said; Behold, the people *is* one, and they *haue* all one language: and this they begin to doe: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they haue imagined to doe.

Goe to, let vs go downe, and there confound their language, that they may not vnderstand one anothers speech.

So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence, vpon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the Citie.

Therefore is the name of it called †Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad vpon the face of all the earth.

Marginal notes: *Wis. 10.5. †Hebr. lippe. †Hebr. words. †Heb. a man said to his neighbour.
†Heb. burne them to a burning. †That is, Confusion.

A return to foreignization, as in Everett Fox’s *Five Books of Moses*, pp. 48-49:

Now all the earth was of one language and one set-of-words.

And it was when they migrated to the east that they found a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there.

They said, each man to his neighbor:

*Come-now! Let us bake bricks and let us burn them well-burnt!*

So for them brick-stone was like building-stone, and raw-bitumen was for them like red-mortar.

Now they said:
Come-now! Let us build ourselves a city and a tower, its top in the heavens,

and let us make ourselves a name,

lest we be scattered over the face of the earth!

5 But YHWH came down to look over the city and the tower that the humans were building.

6 YHWH said:

Here (they are) one people with one language for them all,

and this is merely the first of their doings—

now there will be no barrier for them in all that they scheme to do!

7 Come-now! Let us go down and there let us baffle their language,

so that no man will understand the language of his neighbor.

8 So YHWH scattered them from there over the face of all the earth,

and they had to stop building the city.

9 There its name was called Bavel/Babble,

for there YHWH baffled the language of all the earth-folk,

and from there, YHWH scattered them over the face of the earth.

As William Slights notes in *Managing Readers: Printed Marginalia in English Renaissance Books*, the Geneva translators comment on the tower-builders’ motives “so that readers don’t mistake the nature of the tower-builders’ sin: ‘They were moued with pride and ambition, thinking to [have] preferred their own glorie to God’s honour’ (margin Gen. 11:4)”
Slights also points out that the Geneva translators gloss the phrase “let vs go downe” “to remove the mystery of whom God was talking with by situating the conversation among the parts of the Trinity: ‘He speketh, as thogh he toke counsel with his owne wisdome and power: to wit, with the Sonne and the holy Gost: signifying the greatnes and certeintie of ye punishement’ (margin Gen. 11:7)” (111). Slights concludes from this textual evidence that the Geneva translators “were uneasy with a hermeneutic of indeterminacy” (115) and glossed such passages to “fix certain senses of the text and rule out others” (114). The conclusion he draws from his analysis suggests that the Geneva translators took ownership of the text in their marginal annotations. Each of their marginal glosses fixes the meaning of the text by offering a restatement—“to wit,” “that is,” “which was,” “meaning that,” “signifying [that]”—which, by its disclosure of the passage’s intended meaning, compels the reader to semiotic closure. In short, the gloss closes a passage even as it discloses its meaning.

In taking marginal ownership of the text’s meaning, the Geneva translators assert their economic propriety on the text through rhetorical propriety. Their marginal annotations (dis)close the right, true, or proper reading that readers would otherwise glean from the “text proper.” Economic propriety also informs the translators’ stylistic choices, its stylistic propriety, for the text of Geneva translation calls attention to itself less than contemporary translations. The rhetorical effect the Geneva translators seem to be going for is stylistic “transparency,” an effect of plain style. Plain style does not just present the reader with readable idiom, but also positions the reader not to pause over the text to interrogate its formal and structural features and how they mean beyond the words themselves. Compare, for example, Geneva’s rendering of Gen. 11:3 to Douay-Rheims’ rendering of the same verse. Geneva reads, “And they said one to another, Come let us make bricke, and burne it in the fire. So they had bricke for stone, and slyme had they in steade of mortar.” Douay-Rheims translates the verse, “And each one said to his neighbour:
Come, let vs make brick, and bake them with fire. And they had brick instead of stone, and bitumen instead of mortar.” The Geneva translation has alliterative qualities that offer striking acoustic parallels, such when “bricke . . . burne” turns in the following clause to “they had bricke for stone, and slyme had they in steade of morter.” The translators’ use of antime tabole in the passage—“they had bricke . . . slyme had they”—suggests a clear syntactical connection to the reader, but its significance is not immediately apparent. The Douay translation, on other hand, contains the same acoustic parallels as the Geneva translation, “brick . . . bake,” but rather than coupling their use of alliteration in the following clause with antime tabole, a quick syntactical inversion, the Douay translators instead use syllepsis, a grammatical parallel and syntactical incongruity: “they had brick instead of stone, and bitumen instead of mortar.” Douay’s elision of the “they had” in the second clause tightens the syntax and places more emphasis on the passage’s consonance in “brick . . . bitumen” and “instead . . . stone . . . instead.” Also, the Douay translators’ use of “bitumen” for “slyme” renders the passage more foreign to its readers.

Of course, the first difference between the Douay translation and the Geneva translation that strikes a reader of Gen. 11:3 is Douay’s rendering of the passage “And each one said to his neighbor,” which Geneva translates “And they said to one another.” Unlike the Geneva translation, the Douay stresses not just the builders’ proximity, but also the communal connection that gets severed by their sin. Like the Geneva translators’ glosses, however, the Douay-Rheims translators’ notes on the text attempt to fix its meaning. But because the Douay translation contains not just marginal glosses and endnotes on the text, but also marginal glosses on the endnotes, the glosses on glosses open meaning back up to the reader. The reading experience proves less “fixed” than “Derridean,” as the reader glances from the “text proper” first to the left-hand marginal annotations to discover the meaning of the passage and then to the right-hand marginal annotations to find several Scriptural cross-references on the passage. The left-hand
marginal annotation then refers the reader to an endnote on the passage. The endnote extends the marginal gloss with early church fathers’ commentaries on the passage, commentaries which the translators contextualize and, in some cases, comment upon. Marginal notes also flank the endnotes, and the reader again defers to the right-hand margin to further elucidate doctrines provided in the endnotes and to the right-hand margin to find intertextual instances of the doctrines. Douay’s endnote on Gen. 11:3-4, for example, explains the nature of the tower-builders’ sin as

Here we may see in Nemrod the common causes of heresies, and the manner of Heretikes proceeding. For he having a subtile, proud, and aspiring mind, first detracted from God, persuading men (as is noted before) not to depend on Gods prouidence, and finding some others of like humour, they conspired together, and drew more followers, by bearing the simpler sort in hand (for it was vnprofitible wise men should believe it) that they would make a towre of defence against a new floud, if God should thinke to drowne the world againe. But their principle intention was to make themeslues great and strong for the present, and famous to posteritie. Al which God ouerthrew, neither suffering them to build vp their imagined castle of strength, nor to be praised for their worke, but made them infamous to the worlds end.

This endnote on Genesis 11:4 is flanked by a left-hand marginal note that expounds further upon the passage and cites Nemrod’s actions as “the cause of schisme and heresie.” The marginal note

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102 Actually, the type of marginal note changes from page to page. On recto pages, marginal annotations on both the text and the endnotes appear in the right-hand margin and Scriptural cross-references in the left-hand margin. On verso pages, the annotations appear in the left-hand margin and references on the right-hand margin. Because the references appear on the fold of each page, the annotations would seem to carry more weight.
comments upon the lesson to be gleaned from the passage: “False pretences deceiue the simple. Heretickes prosper for a time, but are confounded in the end.”

This marginal note also anticipates the next end note on Genesis 11:7, in which the Douay translators cite the church fathers’ commentaries on the passage “Come, let vs descend and confound their tongue.” Nemrod’s actions look back to the flood and forward to schism and heresy within the church, all of which reveal God’s just punishment of the wicked. Yet, his actions also reveal God’s infinite wisdom and mercy, says the note on 11:7, for by dividing tongues here at Babel, God rewards the family of Heber for their innocence by allowing them to keep their language (i.e. Hebrew), provides angels to look after the different language groups that come to populate the world as many nations, and anticipates the Apostle’s gift of tongues, by which they make one unified Catholic Church from of these many nations. The Douay translation compounds the text’s meanings by Scriptural cross-reference, the translators’ own commentary, and their citation of patristic commentary. An argument could be made that the Douay translators thus aim to open the Scriptures to the reader.

The KJV translators argue, however, that compounding meanings confounds meaning and closes the Scriptures precisely where they would seem to be most open. As the KJV translators state in several places in their preface, they wished to avoid the scrupulosity of the puritans, who aimed to fix meaning in the text and margins of the Geneva translation, and shunned the obscurity of the papists, whose own translation merely darkened the sense of the Scriptures. Contrary to both of these translations, the KJV translators opt instead to minimize their marginal commentary. In response to James’s rules for translation, the KJV translators followed the Bishops’ Bible closely, revising it where necessary, but “little alter[ing it] as the original [would] permit” (qtd. in Curtis). Taking Genesis 11:1-9 for example, there is little
difference between the Bishops’ translation and the KJV. The only striking difference is that the KJV reduces even further the few, brief marginal notes made in the Bishops’ translation of this passage. As for the text, the KJV translation appears the more compressed of the two. Comparing Genesis 11:3 once more, the Bishops’ renders the passage, “And one sayde to another: Come, let vs prepare brycke, and burne them in the fyre. And they had bricke for stones, and slyme had they in stead of morter.” The KJV renders the same passage, “And †they sayd one to another; Goe to, let vs make brique, and †burne them thorowly. And they had brique for stone, and slime had they for morter.” Apart from a different directive, which in the Bishops’ is translated “Come” and in the KJV is translated “Goe to,” the only other striking differences are that the KJV replaces the Bishops’ “burne [the bryckes] in the fyre” with “burne [the brickes] thorowly” and “slyme had they in stead of morter” with “slime had they for morter.”

The first difference—“Goe to” instead of “Come”—emphasize in the very directive the separation, or schism, the builders’ actions will bring about. The second difference—“burne [the brickes] thorowly” instead of “burne [the bryckes] in the fyre”—merely tightens the syntax of the passage. The final difference is perhaps the most striking, for the KJV translation does not just offer a more concise passage, but also a more parallel passage: “And they had bricke for stone, and slime had they for morter.” The KJV and Bishops’ both maintain the Geneva translation’s use of antimetabole in the passage, “And they had bricke… and slime had they,” as well as its use of alliteration. By revising the Bishops’ “. . . for stone . . . in stead of morter” as “for stone . . . for morter,” the KJV translation renders the passage more parallel in structure. Overall, the KJV’s clarity and conciseness of phrase in the text proper and its limiting of marginal commentary both position the reader to make the text his own. The cumulative effect of the translators’ choices is neither to fix nor compound meanings for the reader, but rather to domesticate the text by rendering it in a clear, concise, and readable English idiom.
The KJV’s longevity as a properly English “classic” is a testament to the translators’ domestication of otherwise alien writings. In a period when the vulgar tongues were competing with the concision of Hebrew, the copiousness of Greek, and the clarity of Latin, the KJV translators did as much to advance the clarity and propriety of English in the minds of philologists as Dolet and Du Bellay did for French in their translations of the classics. The KJV’s longevity is due in part to its translators’ mellifluous rendering of the Bible’s source languages, which, the translators point out in their preface, sound harsh to an ear unused to hearing their cadences. If it is true, as most commentators on Bible translation argue, that translators have traditionally privileged the text’s intelligibility over preserving the sounds and senses of the source language, then modern translation theory has adopted a “new literalism” in answer to the classical “loose” or “dynamic” approach to translation. Modern translation theory largely interprets translators’ attempts to “domesticate” a text as ideologically motivated, and so replace the metaphor “domestication” with “foreignization” as a boon to readers.

In his translation of the Hebrew of the Old Testament, for example, Everett Fox has emphasized the phonetic qualities of Hebrew that very often get lost in English translations. Fox opens his own “Translator’s Preface” to The Five Books of Moses citing Martin Buber’s emphasis on the oral origins of the Hebrew text and the alienating affect it has upon the modern reader. Buber says the following, which Fox offers as theoretical warrant for his own translation of the Hebrew Scriptures:

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104 See Chapter 4, Part 1 “The Rhetoric of Propriety in Early Modern Translations of the Holy Scriptures,” specifically footnote 82. The difference I am drawing here between translators’ “domestication” and “foreignization” of the Scriptures in their translation Lawrence Venuti terms in “Genealogies of Translation Theory: Jerome” the “instrumental” method and “hermeneutic” method of translation, respectively. Venuti argues that the turn from instrumental translation, which is based in classical rhetorical theory, to hermeneutic translation, which is far more sensitive to the linguistic, social, cultural and historical differences between the source and target languages, begins developing during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
Read the Bible as though it were something entirely unfamiliar, as though it had not been set before you ready-made. . . . Face the book with a new attitude as something new. . . . Let whatever may happen occur between yourself and it. You do not know which of its sayings and images will overwhelm and mold you . . . . But hold yourself open. Do not believe anything a priori; do not disbelieve anything a priori. Read aloud the words written in the book in front of you; hear the word you utter and let it reach you. (qtd. in Fox ix)

Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig’s translation of Bible into German was a careful philological reading of the Hebrew and Aramaic source texts. They termed the technique they developed Leitwort, or “leading word,” by which they emphasized verbal parallels and “rhythms” across the whole of the Hebrew Bible (114). They saw the Bible as inherently intertextual, not just in its doctrines or senses, but also in its sounds, words, and phrases. Their translation sets out to recover the intricate cross-referencing that translations like the KJV tend to blur by preferring semantic richness to syntactical and phonological precision. If the KJV translators aimed to free themselves from “niceness in words [which they] always counted the next step to trifling,” Buber, Rosenzweig, and, later, Fox all resist the “clarity and easy fluency” (Fox ix) of early modern and modern translations, but for very different reasons.

Buber and Rosenzweig’s collaborative translation was largely completed between 1925 and 1929, but it gained renewed life in the late thirties and early forties when European Jewish culture came under threat. It was at this time that Buber began theorizing his and Rosenzweig’s translation approach, delivering lectures and writing essays, such as “The How and Why of our Bible Translation” (Palestine, 1938), which explained to readers that their approach to translation was as much textually motivated as it was politically motivated. Buber and Rosenzweig’s
recovery project developed, in part, from their desire to return the language of the Scriptures from the written Word to the spoken Word and, in part, as a response to the Nazis’ attempt to purge the “Jewish influence” from German culture by separating the Old Testament from the New. Their theoretical writings on translation everywhere suggest a deep, abiding, but very real concern with the propriety of the text. About stylistic propriety, for example, Rosenzweig writes in his essay “Scripture and the Word: On the New Bible Translation”:

Every word is a spoken word. The book originally served the word, whether declaimed, sung, or spoken . . . . [But] unintentionally the means become an end, the provisional becomes the permanent, the technical becomes a magic spell. The book no longer serves the word. It becomes the word’s ruler and hindrance; it becomes Holy Scripture . . . . The Bible alone, among all books of the literary epoch, whether literary or pre-literary, demands a pre-literary mode of reading—demands, that is, what the Hebrew expression for reading means . . . namely the most familiar term denoting the Old Testament: the qeri’ah, the “calling out”. It is in response to this command that in all worship Scripture is customarily read aloud; it is in the service of this command that Luther in his translation has recourse to the spoken language of the people. The crucial question to ask of any new translation is whether this command has been fulfilled at a given time and for a given people.

The fetters that today hold all written German mute are constituted by the semantic system in which the words are embedded: punctuation . . . . When, therefore, these fetters must be loosed at any cost . . . we need . . . drastic measures. Martin Buber has found these measures. The bond of the tongue must
be loosed by the eye. We must free from beneath the logical punctuation that is sometimes its ally and sometimes its foe the fundamental principle of natural, oral punctuation: the act of breathing.

Breath is the stuff of speech; the drawing of breath is accordingly the natural segmenting of speech. (40-42)

An obvious parallel to Buber and Rosenzweig’s German translation of the Bible is Martin Luther’s, whose rhetorical situation Buber and Rosenzweig compare to their own. All three find their exigency in a desire to revitalize religious fervor by translating the Scriptures into the living language of their contemporaries. The central problem Buber claims he and Rosenzweig wrestled with in their translation, which he claims Luther was also wrestling with when he asked his readers to “give the Hebrew some room where it does better than German can,” is “that of moving the text and that of moving the reader” (47). At issue is whether the translator ought to bend the text to accommodate his readers or bend his readers to accommodate the text. Buber argues that translators subscribing to the former view, and Luther and the KJV translators were among them, must appropriate the text when they accommodate their readers. He writes,

If somewhere [the Bible] has become a familiar, customary possession, it must again and anew, as a foreign and unfamiliar sound, stir up the complacent satedness of its alleged possessor from the outside. This book and this book alone among all the books of humankind must not find its end in the treasure-house of human culture—because, precisely, it must not find an end in the first place. (48)

In the stylistic “drastic measures” they take to produce the rhetorical effect of foreignization and strangeness, Buber and Rosenzweig intend to produce in the reader a kind of mystification analogous to genuine religious awakening. Stylistically, they focus on breathing, not punctuation
as the “proper measure” to capture the natural rhythms and cadences of the Hebrew. Rhetorically, they move reader to text, rather than text to reader to evoke a more “fitting” religious response in the reader. Because the text resists “appropriation” by any one reader or culture, it belongs to all, everywhere, and for all time.

As translator and editor of Buber and Rosenzweig’s work, Everett Fox is very much influenced by their translation approach. In his *Five Books of Moses*, he thus sets out to “present the text in English dress but with a Hebraic voice” (ix), in much the same fashion as Buber and Rosenzweig did in German. Fox admittedly resists the “clarity and easy fluency” of modern and early modern English translations to produce the rhetorical-poetical effect of “estrangement.” The effect is apparent in the same passage cited above (i.e. *Genesis* 11:3):

> They said, each man to his neighbor:

> Come-now! Let us bake bricks and let us burn them well-burnt!

> So for them brick-stone was like building-stone, and raw-bitumen was for them like red-mortar. (Fox 48)

A comparison with Buber and Rosenzweig’s German translation and later explication of the same passage shows what Fox has in mind in his English translation:

> Sie sprachen ein Mann zum Genossen:

> Heran! backen wir Backsteine und brennen wir sie zu Brande!

> So war ihnen der Backstein statt Bausteins und das Roherdpech war ihnen statt Roterdmörtels. (qtd. in Weissbort and Eysteinsson 321)
Astradur Eysteinsson’s literal English translation of Buber and Rosenzweig’s German renders the passage:

They spoke, each man to his fellow man:

Go to it! let us bake stones of brick and let us burn them in the fire!

So for them the brick stone was instead of building stone, and the raw pitch was for them instead of red mortar. (Weissbort and Eysteinsson 321)

Fox’s and Eysteinsson’s translations both pick up on the repetitive cadences and alliterative qualities that Buber and Rosenzweig’s German translation reproduces from the Hebrew. Fox translates the pairings “backen/Backsteine . . . brennen/Brande” as “bake/brick-stone . . . burn/well-burnt,” and Eysteinsson as “bake stones of brick . . . burn [them in the] fire.” Fox likewise translates the pairings “Backstein/Baustein” and “Roherdpech/ Roterdmörtels” as “brick-stone/building-stone” and “raw-bitumen/red-mortar,” and Eysteinsson as “brick stone/building stone” and “raw pitch/red mortar.” A comparison of Fox’s and Eysteinsson’s translations shows that both are literal renderings, but that Fox’s use of the hyphen pulls the text more tightly together and makes its alliterative patterns much more emphatic, a technique translators have used to capture in English text the “oral-aural” qualities of stories like the *Iliad* and *Beowulf*.

Buber’s own explication of his German translation in “A Translation of the Bible” further elucidates Fox’s intention:

We take seriously not only the text’s semantic characteristics but also its acoustic ones. It became clear to us, accordingly, that the text’s abundant alliterations and assonances could not be understood in aesthetic terms alone; often if not always it is passages of religious importance in which assonance and alliteration occur,
and both assonance and alliteration thus help make this importance emerge more vividly. [. . . ]

We have, as I said, had in mind the Bible “aloud.” We proceed from the notion that the Bible is a product of living recitation, and is intended for living recitation; that speech is its nature, and the written text only a form for preserving it. Hence our method of rendering its rhythm. Our translation is the first colometric translation…i.e. the first that gives the text its natural division into lines of meaning as these are determined by the laws of human breathing and human speech, with each line constituting a rhythmic unit. (170-71)

The acoustical qualities of the text, argues Buber, must position readers as listeners so that they resonate with them, for the text’s acoustics hold religious significance that very often gets muted in paraphrastic translations. In his explication of Genesis 11:1-9, Buber writes,

[T]he remarkable account of how the architects of Babel built of lebenah, brick, rather than eben, stone, and used as mortar not homer, loam or clay, but hemar, pitch or asphalt . . . This is no pun; rather the acoustic similarity emphasizes the nature of the situation, in which the builders must discard natural materials for artificial ones, or at any rate for materials that can be brought out of the earth only with considerable effort. The first half of the verse, “so for them brick-stone [Backstein] was like building-stone [Baustein]”, worked well enough. (166-67)

In his essay “A Translation of the Bible,” Buber faults previous Old Testament translators’ contentment “to put down something ‘appropriate,’ something ‘corresponding’” (166) to the sense of the Hebrew. Perhaps for the first time the history of translation, Buber labels the paraphrastic impulse inherent in classical translation theory following Cicero an “impropriety.”
Because English translators of the Bible, among them the Geneva, Bishops’, and KJV translators, closely followed Tyndale’s translation, they likewise inherited his paraphrastic impulse—his belief that the Bible should be accessible to every ploughboy.

The Ciceronian (i.e. paraphrastic) and Buberian (i.e. new literalist) traditions differ strikingly from one another in several respects; however, implicit in their respective approaches (as well as those departing slightly from these Ciceronian and Buberian “poles”) is a “rhetoric” of translation that does not simply govern stylistic choices but has very real social and political consequences. As the several translators’ prefaces and translations of the Scriptures analyzed in this Appendix reveal, the “rhetoric” of translation becomes divided into “rhetorics” of translation clearly delineated around the issue of propriety.
In his book *Milton and the Martial Muse*, James Freeman argues that Milton presents his Satan of *Paradise Lost* as a conventional martial hero only to deconstruct the convention and show that patient words win greater glory than military might. Freedman claims that Milton’s poem “speaks against war with such learning, complexity and humanness that it still towers over other statements in our long Western tradition” (61). Beyond any implied statement Milton might have made about the tragedy of war and the ruin begotten by violent action, he does make explicit statement about how his poem will refashion the conventional epic argument:

> Wars, hitherto the only argument

> Heroic deemed, chief mastery to dissect

> With long and tedious havoc fabled knights

> In battles feigned; the better fortitude

> Of patience and heroic martyrdom

> Unsung. (9.28-33)

In his epic, Milton sings neither of the anger of Achilles and the souls he sent to Hades nor of arms and Juno’s unrelenting hate. Milton invents outside the typical epic conventions and sings instead of “the better fortitude / Of patience and heroic martyrdom.” At first sight, “patience
tried” is neither an epic topic nor terribly exciting, certainly not as exciting as military conquest, feats of arms, and terrors on the open sea. This is not to say that Milton does not make war a subject of his epic, for Robert Fallon contends that the war in heaven in Book Six of *Paradise Lost* is “in the classic tradition of Homer and Virgil” and John Coffey points out that “of the poem’s ten thousand lines, nine hundred are devoted to actual battle” (Fallon 119; Coffey 157). When one couples Satan’s review of his fallen force in Book One and the demonic military council he convenes in Book Two, Coffey concludes that “around a quarter of *Paradise Lost* concerns war in the widest sense” (157). And yet much in the poem—nearly nine tenths or three quarters by Coffey’s estimation—carries the same force as Book Six and is no less “epic” in its ability to excite the reader. The virtues of passivity and patience, love and obedience, which Milton commends as better than the martial virtues, he dramatizes in dialogue rather than in action, military contest largely giving way in *Paradise Lost* to oratorical contest. It is rather through mental might and verbal dexterity that the poem’s heroes show their virtue. Milton’s famous comment in *Paradise Lost* on the epic tradition does less to confirm that he was dismissive of the virtues of militancy than to suggest that he likened the discursive arts to the art of war as subjects worthy of epic.

It is perhaps more precise to say that Milton approached oratory in much the same manner as one might approach military conquest, for the tensest moments in *Paradise Lost* are not depictions of battle, but rather oratorical confrontations—among the fallen angels in Pandemonium, between the Son and the Father in heaven, between Satan and Uriel on the sun, between Raphael and Adam in the garden, between Adam and Eve just before the fall, between Satan and Eve during the temptation, and among the Father, Adam, and Eve after the fall. Milton
elevates the verbal contest to the place military conquest once held in epic\textsuperscript{105}, viewing the Christian’s place in the world as a soldier of Christ whose spiritual armor is his right reasoning and whose weapons are both logical and moving oratory. Early in his education Milton had learned to use the language arts of rhetoric and logic as weapons to be wielded in verbal contests, but it is in his more mature prose and poetry that Milton reveals a deep and abiding concern with the proper use of the language arts of rhetoric and logic—that they serve as an index of the Christian’s ability perceive the good that is God’s will and persuade or convince others that these perceptions are accurate or true. Scholars have noted Milton’s classical, Ciceronian education in the language arts and how this training had influenced his writings on rhetoric and logic in his prose tracts and uses of rhetoric and logic in his poetry.\textsuperscript{106} Scholars have also remarked that

\textsuperscript{105} Irene Samuel argues in her essay “The Development of Milton’s Poetics” that literary variety shaped Milton’s concept of literary decorum, which did not agree precisely with Aristotle’s concept of to prepon or Cicero’s concept of decorum. The sheer mix of literary genres apparent in Milton’s epic poetry—among them aubade, serenade, debate, hymn, epitaph, allegory, romance, morality, mystery play, comedy, satire and melodrama—suggests a much broader concept of literary decorum for Samuel than in the strict classical sense that excludes “all but the loftiest epic and tragic verse as unworthy of [epic’s] high mission” (240). Though Milton never found the occasion to declare his poetics, Samuel finds sufficient evidence of poetical variety in Milton’s epic poetry, rhetorical theory and prose tracts. Like many Puritan writers of his generation, Milton borrows upon what the writing occasion demands, even if the purposes of the writing genres upon which Milton draws conflict with the purposes of another. A broader sense of to prepon or literary decorum motivates Milton’s stylistic choices as his writing matures—that poetry ought to have some utility to the commonwealth. Samuel thus notes surprising consistency in Milton’s “tacit” poetics: “in his steadfast belief in the high office native to the art (however inadequately most poets fill it), his persistent emphasis on the inspiration necessary to the poet (however necessary his prolonged training), and his insistence on the audience’s requisite fitness (however great the poet’s own gifts)” (231). These ideals are remarkably political in their orientation and rhetorical in their execution, particularly the first and the last. The thrust of Milton’s poetics would seem to be a rhetoric of propriety—the poet’s suitability to take up this “high office” in the service of the state and his audience’s fittingness to hear the poet’s message and act accordingly.

\textsuperscript{106} Milton’s “Ciceronianism” is well documented. In a recent essay on “Rhetorical Signatures in Milton’s Pamphlets of 1649,” for instance, James Egan briefly reviews the critical literature surrounding Milton’s life and work, including his prose polemic and poetry. Egan details the rhetorical devices Milton used as dominant oratorical, animadverte, and aesthetic modes in 1649, which, Egan observes, Milton also used in his more mature prose and poetry. Egan cites critics like Wayne Rebhorn, who “has claimed that most Renaissance writers were taught to see rhetoric and poetry as nearly identical in character [and has noted] that handbooks of rhetoric often took their examples from poetry” (191). The most popular contemporary treatises on poetic—Philip Sidney’s A Defense of Poesie (1595) and George Puttenham’s The Art of English Poesie (1589)—both advocated a “rhetorical poetic.” Egan also cites several commentators on Milton’s early education and training in classical rhetoric, which would have certainly shaped his prose
Milton’s preparations for the ministry and training in the preaching arts had shaped both the rhetoric of his prose tracts and the poetics of his major epics just as much as his early education had. Scholars have thus observed the Christian-Humanist ideal motivating Milton’s philosophy of language. Largely missing from these critical treatments of Milton’s rhetoric and poetics, however, is an examination of Milton’s sense of rhetorical propriety, which Milton grounded directly in an interesting blend of classical rhetoric and Ramist logic. For Milton, the rhetorical, aesthetic, ethical, political and even moral considerations that guide proper language use in various social situations share a similar logic that can be traced to the mind and Word of God. To think as God thinks and speak as God speaks was an ideal that Milton shared with Ramus, and this ideal moved Milton to write of logical and rhetorical propriety in his prose tracts and dramatize the propriety of Christian rhetoric in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* in the person of the Christian orator, whom Milton models for readers in the character of Christ.

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107 Milton had studied for the ministry but later abandoned that life. Jameela Lares argues in her book *Milton and the Preaching Arts* that Milton’s religious and rhetorical training for the ministry influenced the theological-rhetorical framework of his poetics. More specifically, in this book Lares aims to “demonstrate how Milton’s age understood the role of the preacher” and to “demonstrate the degree to which Milton . . . appropriate[s] into his own works the forms and procedures that shaped sermons” (2).

108 Milton’s “Ramism” or “alleged Ramism” has been a subject of much critical debate. Early essays on Milton’s logic, such as Peter Fisher’s “Milton’s Logic,” offer a more nuanced view of Milton’s Ramist influence. As early as 1962, Fisher had already characterized the crux of the debate: “It has been stated that Milton’s logic is more Aristotelian than Ramist in form, and for that matter, that the logic of Ramus himself deviated from that of Aristotle less than he would have us believe” (37). This position, advanced by Albert Duhamel in his 1952 essay “Milton’s Alleged Ramism,” also implied that “Milton’s early rationalism was fundamentally at odds with the prophetic spirit of Ramist logic and its reliance on the intuitive perception of logical relations is not in harmony with Milton’s outlook and especially with the development of his thinking in later years” (37). According to Fisher, evidence of both Aristotelian and Ramist logic can be found in Milton’s early and mature writings.

109 In his essay “The Humanist Tradition and Milton’s Satan,” Wayne Rebhorn notes several crucial tensions present in Christian Humanist thought that largely stemmed from the conflict between secular and Christian goals in the Christian Humanist educational program. Students were not only encouraged to imitate classical prose styles, but also classical lifestyles. Rebhorn points out that “[s]tudents were given
Before Milton dramatized logical and rhetorical propriety in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, he had begun developing his understanding of the proper use of the language arts in his prose tracts. His earliest treatment of logical and rhetorical propriety appears in the *Prolusions*, where the military precision with which Milton approached the language arts, particularly the arts of logic and rhetoric, is made plainly evident. Milton’s *Prolusions* reveal a student very much invested in rhetoric, but who still privileged logic as the seat of learning. As academic exercises, prolusions offer the student an opportunity to present his rhetorical sophistication, and in fact, Milton’s *Prolusions* are highly stylized oratorical performances, even as he calls attention to his want of eloquence. In several of these exercises, the Latin originals of which Milton published in 1674, many years after his school years, Milton argues that clear and logical argument make an effective speech, not just the style in which a speech is delivered. That he published his *Prolusions* in 1674, the same year he published his last work, *Paradise Lost, A Poem in Twelve Books*, suggests that Milton recognized something in his early work that he still closely adhered to in his mature writings, and indeed there are many echoes of his early adherence to discursive clarity and logical propriety not only in his mature prose writings, but also in his epic poetry.

role-models like Alexander and Achilles, Caesar and Aeneas to follow, and if their Humanist teachers still retained avowedly Christian goals of moral formation in their educational programs, those goals were often poorly harmonized with the more secular impulses stemming from Greek and Roman antiquity” (89). It was the task of great thinkers like Erasmus, More, Vives, and much later, John Milton, to clarify the terms of the Christian-Humanist conflict and offer “imitatio Christi” as the basic goal of the Christian Humanist educational program. This educational program was still not without its tensions even in Milton’s day, however, for Rebhorn finds evidence in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* of Milton’s clear separation of the Christian virtues of faith, hope and charity and the “higher pagan virtues” like wisdom temperance, and mental fortitude or patience from the traditionally “heroic” virtues like physical strength, military skill, cunning, and unbounded energy (90). Much like Augustine, who attempted to baptize pagan rhetoric for Christian ends, Milton would seem to conflate Christian virtues and heroic virtues. Rebhorn claims that Satan’s embracing of classical, heroic virtues is incompatible with the goal of Christian Humanist education as Milton came to understand it: *imitatio Christi*. However, Rebhorn overlooks the angelic host’s military skill and the Son’s military might during the war in heaven in *Paradise Lost* and Christ’s rhetorical cunning and inner fortitude during his trials in the desert in *Paradise Regained*. Much like Augustine’s classical influence, Milton’s use of classical rhetoric, which shaped both his subject and his style in these epics, cannot be entirely separated from the pagan virtues and the values and worldviews that gave rise to them.
Milton opens his speech “Whether Day or Night Is the More Excellent,” for instance, fearful that he will not meet a sympathetic audience. He admits, “What a plight I am in today! In the very first words of my speech I am afraid that I am going to say something unbecoming to a speaker, and that I shall be obliged to neglect the first and most important duty of an orator” (595). And yet, Milton has already opened the speech by appealing to the audience’s knowledge of this oratorical “maxim”—that the opening of the speech ought to dispose the auditors to both the speaker and his cause. By citing what an orator should do at the opening of his speech, Milton reiterates for his audience the very rules of speech-making, which is something upon which they can all agree. His expression of fear that he might offend his hearers’ sense of decorum perhaps belies a genuine anxiety, for in calling attention to the oratorical performance as a mere exercise in the lines that follow, Milton risks losing his audience’s sympathy. Rather than appeal to his hearers’ sense of style and taste, about which he admits he cares but little, Milton instead appeals to their reason: “I should rather have their approval—however few they be—than that of countless legions of ignorant fellows who have no mind, no reasoning faculties, no sound judgment, and who try to sell themselves by their bragging and ridiculous froth of talk” (595).

Milton approached the prologue as more than mere entertainment, as more than a chance to show his wit in a highly polished style. If showing his wit was what he was after, Milton did so through his ability to invent.  

Milton opens several other oratorical performances with rhetorical strategies similar to the ones he uses at the opening of “Whether the Day or Night Is More Excellent.” He first expresses anxiety over his want of eloquence. He then introduces a rhetorical maxim. He closes by calling attention to the artifice of his speaking situation and appeals instead to his hearers’

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110 Ramist logic consolidated in a twofold structure the classical rhetorical canons of invention and disposition. Proper invention meant finding the right ideas and language materials. Proper disposition meant arranging those materials in a clear and logical order.
reason and logic. Milton opens “On the Music of the Spheres” saying, “If, Members of the University, there is any room for my insufficiency after so many and such able speakers have been heard today, I shall now try, as far as my small ability permits, to show how friendly I am to the solemn ceremonial of this day” (602). Having expressed his want of eloquence to fit the occasion, Milton then introduces a rhetorical maxim and begs his hearers’ patience in listening to the first, more stylized part of his speech:

So it has occurred to me to offer a few preliminary remarks in a free style of eloquence and (as the saying is) “with open palm” about that celestial harmony on which there is soon to be a debate, as it were, with the clenched fist:—but with due respect to the time limits, which both spur me and curb me. And yet I hope, my hearers, that you will take what I say as being said, as it were, in jest. (603)

Milton prepares his audience for the more serious logical debate that will follow his oratorical performance, which has, he discloses at the end of his speech, done more to obfuscate than to clarify the substance of his speech. “[F]or I am afraid,” says Milton, “that by my rough and inharmonious style I have all along been clashing with this very harmony which I am proclaiming and that I myself have impeded your hearing of it. And so I shut up” (604).

The same strategy is again apparent, albeit in more compressed form, in Milton’s “Against Scholastic Philosophy” with which he opens,

A strenuous search for a rhetorical display that would fascinate you, my collegiate audience, was by no means the least of my recent worries until suddenly I bethought myself of what was so often laid down in the writings of
Cicero (whose name I not inauspiciously set on my masthead): that the business of the speaker is to inform, to regale, and to convince his hearers. (604)

Milton notes that because his audience is learned, he forgoes the business of informing them of the subject of his speech. As for “regaling” his audience, Milton admits that regaling and convincing an audience are one and same duty: “As for regaling you—as I fear I am far from talented enough to do—it is my dearest hope, and if I attain it, the result will certainly be much the same as convincing you” (604-05). As in the other academic exercises he published, it is not clear whether Milton felt genuine anxiety about his ability to regale his audience or made self-deprecating statements as a figure of ethos, using litotes or sprezzatura to feign modesty and artlessness and by so doing gain the favor and sympathy of his hearers. It is clear that he deplored cacozelia and other stylistic vices that appeared too obviously artificial and affected. But for all his stylistic subtlety in these exercises, Milton stresses at crucial moments in each of his *Prolusions* that highly stylized speech is mere noise if it does not contain a clear and logically disposed argument.

The point of his coupling “regaling” and “convincing” in “Against Scholastic Philosophy” is that he will have achieved his end of persuasion if he can convince his audience, as he says, “out of his own heart’s judgment” (605). The kind of sympathy or fellow-feeling Milton has in mind here results less from any ethical appeal he has made, much less from any emotional appeal he has made, which are the rhetor’s customary means of gaining audience sympathy. Instead, he secures his hearers’ sympathy by winning their assent, by asking for their thoughtful and logical consideration of his argument. Milton thus closes the introduction to his speech “Against Scholastic Philosophy,” “Yes truly, [I] make the soundness and rightness of my thesis plain to everyone. . . .” (605). Milton “regales and convinces,” or pleases and profits, his
hearers with well-reasoned and judiciously-arranged argument, plain and simple logic serving as the most effective and ethical style.\footnote{Aristotle understood that even though the enthymeme could be said to lose some of the precision otherwise found in syllogistic reasoning on account of its “situatedness,” the enthymeme contained a propositional logic as persuasive as the logical syllogism, but flexible enough to be adapted to various rhetorical situations. Rather than bend the audience to the method, as syllogistic reasoning requires, the enthymeme answers the orator’s and audience’s needs. Aristotle recognized that the logical proof in rhetoric had to be serviceable to the contingencies of time, place, and audience. Not only did the orator have to possess an understanding of logical proof, he also had to possess enough wisdom and experience to read his speaking situation rightly and adapt his discourse to all the variables he perceived therein. \textit{Kairos}, which concerns the discourse’s suitability to its occasion, presupposes a wise and experienced orator, one who has mastered the art of discourse and yet still possesses a sense of social propriety. Aristotle treats the art of discourse in his \textit{Rhetoric}, remarking upon propriety as something belonging to the speech itself and noting that it appears most clearly in the style in which the speech is clothed.} Even the conclusion of this speech, though it targets Scholastic Philosophy in particular, makes plain Milton’s position on what exactly profits the English people in their learning of the language arts:

And so now the last point which I proposed to discuss becomes clear: namely, that this impudent battle of words does nothing for the good of society or for the honor or profit of our fatherland, the first priority, by common consent, in the sciences.

Now I have observed that our country is pre-eminently strengthened and honored by two things: by clear speaking and by brave deeds. And surely this contentious duel of clashing opinions seems impotent either to teach eloquence or to develop wisdom or to stir men to brave actions. (606)

In the first paragraph of this passage, Milton advances the Baconian imperative that, in their quest for knowledge, men ought to hunt more for the substance of a matter than the words with which to present it. Bacon and Milton both had inherited the humanists’ critique of scholastic philosophy, which very often obfuscated the subject of inquiry by attending too much to stylistic minutiae. The same critique was leveled at Renaissance rhetoricians—near contemporaries of
Bacon and Milton—who very often privileged colorful figures or stylized turns of phrase to plain and simple discourse. Like Bacon, Milton made discursive clarity a rhetorical priority.

In the second paragraph of this passage, Milton pairs clear speaking with brave deeds, suggesting that both will in some way contribute to the English people’s wisdom, eloquence, and honor. In the second paragraph especially, Milton follows the ancient Greek philosophers and rhetoricians, who paired words and deeds as indices of clear and proper thinking. Much of what the ancient Greeks debated in their philosophical traditions was already present in their cultural traditions, so that one needs only to examine early Greek literature to find a ready repository of ancient Greek culture. Philosophers like Plato and rhetoricians like Gorgias found dramatized in early Greek poetry, specifically Homeric epic, several “situational rhetorics” consolidating their personal experiences of and evidencing their theorizing about rhetorical propriety. The orality of Homeric epic is crucial to Greek philosophers’ considerations of rhetorical propriety mainly because in the poetry and rhetoric of an oral culture like that of the ancient Greeks, propriety becomes an index of identity: “In [the Homeric epics],” writes Hermann Frankel in *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy,* “factual report of what men do and say, everything that men are, is expressed, because they are no more than what they do and say and suffer” (79; qtd. in McKenna 26). Frankel notes that Homeric epic tells of the sayings, suffering, and actions of legendary Greek men, but the poetry also shows that the Greeks viewed verbal expression itself as a kind of action. What men do and what they say show us something of their character, even when they report to us about what others do and say. That a Greek’s reputation was so clearly bound up with his speech and actions places propriety at the center of Greek social life. In Homeric epic, human expression tells us something about events past, present, and future, but also about the inner life of man—his virtues, his shortcomings, his judgments, and his sensibilities.
Inculcated as he was in classical values, Milton views clear speech as commensurate with brave deeds much like the Greeks had, and both ought to be used in the service of the fatherland. The poet’s position is in Milton’s view a political position, for in his writing the poet characterizes the language and thinking of his people. Milton concludes, much like the Greeks, that “clear speech” is commensurate with “brave deeds,” for it tells something of a person’s moral and ethical character. That Milton later came to conflate the classical virtues of bravery, fortitude, and temperance with the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity suggests that the classical markers of ethical character map nicely onto the Christian markers of moral character. Clear speech connotes clear, logical thinking, an expression of the supremely orderly and rational mind of God. Brave deeds connote a soul aspiring beyond its fallen condition. The ethical imperative that Milton found in classical republican values he also found in the Scriptures. Paul, for instance, extolled the virtues of plain discourse as a marker of clear and rational thinking, and Christ’s ministry had modeled the virtue of brave deeds. Milton thus embraced one of the period’s commonplaces—that speaking and writing style evidence the language user’s character and the English language itself evidences the character of the English people.

Even as Milton’s writing matured into epic poetry, these early academic exercises gave him an opportunity to refine his style by considering the composition of his audience and his hearers’ various tastes. Each oration offers a slightly different speaking occasion, of which Milton is certainly conscious, for he reflects on the occasion in the speech itself. Milton takes a slightly different tone in “That Sportive Exercises Are Occasionally Not Adverse to Philosophic Studies” than he does in the other orations. This oration is seemingly delivered in jest, apparently to amuse the audience. And yet Milton also appears highly aware of the propriety of his speech, which suggests that the performance could go awry. The playful tone he presents his hearers could fall flat. There is risk-taking even in jest. Dividing his speech in half, Milton spends the first half
simply securing his hearers’ attention and disposing them toward the subject of his speech. He opens in much the same way he does his other orations, making several commonplace appeals to his lack of wit and rhetorical sophistication. He calls attention to his rhetorical blundering only to appeal to his hearers’ vanity:

And now, truly, I am supremely happy and marvelously pleased when I see so great a gathering of most learned men surrounding me and crowding around me. And yet when I descend into myself as if with my eyes turned inward intimately consider my slender ability, I often blush at what I alone know, and suddenly an assault of sadness crushes and chokes my surging joy. (613)

With the weight of such a learned audience pressing in upon him, Milton says he must invoke the Muse to breathe the proper degree of life and style into his speech. But who needs the Muse when surrounded by such learning, which is itself inspiration enough to continue. And so he does continue, but not without some hesitation: “And so I hope and pray, O most excellent hearers, that this very ordinary feast of mine may suit your fine and fastidious taste” (615). Milton’s remark upon his hearers’ sophistication shows that he is attentive to the stylistic propriety of his speech, and in fact, he admits that he is eager to please them: “you should know, O fellow Collegians, that for your pleasure I have momentarily dropped my usual character, and if I say anything indecorous or improper, do not think of it as expressive of my true mind or nature, but as reflecting the needs of the time and the spirit of the place” (617). To suit the style of his speech to its substance and occasion, Milton must leave off the part of the serious thinker and play the part of the fool. He seemingly abandons social (or ethical) propriety for rhetorical propriety in this oration, except that he never quite leaves off the part of the serious thinker.
In keeping with culinary conceit with which he opens his oration, Milton refers to this “feast” he has prepared in one place as “ordinary” and in another as “tasteless” or “bland”:

You see what we have prepared for you. I beg you hungry men to fall to. But I foresee that you are going to say that these viands, like the midnight feasts which are prepared by the devil for the witches, have been concocted without salt, and I am afraid that you will go away hungrier than you came. (619)

What at first taste seems bland and rather unappealing Milton turns into a very well seasoned feast. He is confident that he has satiated his hearers’ appetites, if not necessarily their tastes. If we take Milton at his word that his speech is without apparent “salt” or “wit,” the speech does not fail on that account. Rather, as Milton shows in the speech’s substance, there is something almost “diabolical” in its power to move the audience without overpowering the hearers’ tastes with too much wit. By offering plain, but gratifying fare, Milton appeases his audience without quite abandoning his sense of social (or ethical) propriety. He pairs stylistic clarity with ethical and rhetorical propriety so as to remain natural, even artless in his delivery.

Just as Milton sees the rigors of discourse like military discipline in other of his prose tracts, here too in his prolusion “That Sportive Exercises Are Occasionally Not Adverse to Philosphic Studies” Milton sees all discourse, whether serious or playful, as opportunities to stretch one’s verbal muscles, adding

And something more: just as those who practice wrestling and other field sports become much stronger than others and readier for every task; so it usually comes about that the mind’s sinews are toughened by this mental gymnastic, and a better blood and spirit seem to be developed, and all a man’s abilities are made more apt and versatile for all purposes. (615)
Milton moves beyond the easy comparison of sportive exercises to philosophical study and advances a more exact (and exacting) conflation—that rhetorical exercises approached in jest by both speaker and audience have much in common with serious philosophical speculation. Like rigorous philosophical study, epideictic rhetoric offers the speaker an occasion to invent, an opportunity to exercise his reason in surveying what he knows so that he might take risks and learn from what he doesn’t know. Milton’s rhetoric in each of these orations follows a logical pattern similar to one Ramus offers in his dialectical method. Milton and Ramus both assume man’s ignorance at the outset of their method and likewise see it as man’s motive for inventing and organizing the known in order to search and learn about the unknown. Milton’s appeal to

112 Although he questions the degree to which Ramist logic influenced Milton’s poetics, William Pallister does suggest that Ramus had just as much influence on Milton’s poetics as the classical rhetoricians had, especially given Milton’s training in the “curriculum of the European humanists, the studia humanitatis,” which comprised the language arts of grammar, rhetoric, logic, and poetry, as well as history, moral philosophy, and other sciences:

The cultural and educational priorities of humanism [writes Pallister] ensured that rhetoric was substantially a literary enterprise, concerned with the language of expressing ideas at least as much as the ideas themselves. This engagement with form meant that lettered men of the time were preoccupied with the ideal of eloquence, defined by the sixteenth-century French educator Peter Ramus (echoing the Roman rhetorician Quintilian) as “the power of expressing oneself well” (vis est bene dicendi). Eloquence was more than fluency in style, however much, as we shall see, style held a key place in humanist rhetoric. It was, in its true pursuit, a harmonious union between wisdom and style, with an emphasis on persuasion that often stressed the efficacy of moving the emotions. The art of rhetoric, replete with precepts to guide literary composition at all stages, constituted the methodological infrastructure of eloquence. It is this status as the technical machinery of eloquence in all its forms, from letters to historical and philosophical treatises, that allowed rhetoric to play a major role in the development of Renaissance culture. Of all the disciplines to which rhetoric imparted form and a consciousness of expressive intention, none was more closely connected with it, virtually since the inception of both arts, than poetry. (7)

Pallister observes what other critics, such as Wayne Rebhorn and James Egan, have termed the period’s “rhetorical poetic,” a rhetorical approach to poetry outlined in such treatises as Sidney’s Defense and Puttenham’s Art. Pallister rightly adds the Ramist influence as not merely “the power of expressing oneself well,” but expressing one’s ideas in a language suited to persuade. Pallister touches upon rhetorical propriety and the role Aristotle’s appeals play in the orator or writer’s ensuring that he addresses his audience (and dresses his speech or writing) in a style suited to persuade or elicit the intended emotional response, but he neither develops his observations on rhetorical propriety nor ties it to Ramist logic to explain Milton’s philosophy of language or composition.

113 Ramist dialectic largely operates according to a binary logic. The dialectician works on his subject by dividing it into constituent topical pairs, each of which informs the subject in some way, and thereafter categorizing the pairs as several species of proposition falling into one of ten propositional commonplaces. The dialectician uses his knowledge of the commonplaces not only to generate the constituent topical pairs, but also the proposition he makes about them. Ramus understands dialectic as an invention strategy to
the Muse earlier in this speech to lend his speech force and liveliness is conventional, yet telling. Milton’s opening each of these orations with a convention of examining the speaking occasion itself registers his anxiety about applying speaking conventions he knows well, but which he applies in new speaking situations. His invention upon known conventions in new speaking situations is precisely that rhetorical exercise that Milton terms “mental gymnastic” and likens to the rigors of philosophical speculation.

That logical invention is at the heart of Milton’s concerns as an orator becomes readily apparent in the speech that was one of his requirements for advancement to the Master’s degree, “Learning Makes Men Happier than Does Ignorance.” Although Milton follows the same basic rhetorical pattern in this prolusion as he did in the preceding ones, he at once addresses invention as the most difficult of the orator’s tasks, yet the one most deserving of applause. At the opening of his speech, Milton cites Cicero’s conception of the ideal orator as the man who can invent a speech on any subject whatever:

For I have learned from the printed and spoken wisdom of the most learned men that nothing mean or mediocre is tolerable in an orator any more than it is in a poet, and that it behoves [sic] an aspirant to true, and not to merely specious eloquence, to be instructed and perfected in an all-around foundation in the all the arts and in every science. Since my years do not permit this, I have hitherto preferred to set up that foundation and to struggle for that true glory by long and

discourse on a subject simply because by using it the dialectician always finds something more to say on the subject. Each of the propositions the dialectician generates he can develop into an explanation of the topic, which allows the dialectician to discourse on both the constituent topics and their logical relation to the subject he took as the starting point of his investigation. The dialectician takes each constituent pair as two subjects and divides them in turn into their respective constituent topical pairs, again taking each topic in the pair as a subject worthy of further investigation. He proceeds until he has exhausted his thinking or moved too far away from the subject with which he opened his investigation.
strenuous study rather than to grab a false glory on the basis of a forced and immature style. (622)

Cicero is often read as the premier prose stylist, but he followed Isocrates closely in uniting wisdom and eloquence. For Isocrates and Cicero alike, a speech’s style must be wed to its subject, and a speaker might be said to speak well on his subject only if he knows that subject well. For Cicero especially, eloquence presupposes that the orator has both vast knowledge in various areas and the kind of sensitivity to audience and situation that only comes from a sense of social propriety. Cicero says of knowledge,

I am of this opinion, that no one is to be numbered among orators who is not thoroughly accomplished in all branches of knowledge requisite for a man of good breeding; and though we may not put forward such knowledge in conversation, yet it is apparent, and indeed evident, whether we are destitute of it, or have acquired it . . . . (24)

Of course, no one style will answer to and cover every speaking situation, so that a part of the orator’s sense of propriety has to do with adjusting the style to the subject, the audience, and the occasion of the speech. Cicero is certainly sensitive to the fact that the orator’s rhetorical situation—the topic, audience, purpose, and circumstances of a speech—determines what will be deemed “appropriate.”

Unlike other orators who privilege plain style, Cicero seems to favor a kind of eloquence that develops out of studied diction and embellishment. Without extensive reading in diverse subjects, however, one never cultivates a style in Cicero’s sense of the term:
A knowledge of a vast number of things is necessary, without which volubility of words is empty and ridiculous; speech itself is to be formed, not merely by choice, but by careful construction of words; and all the emotions of the mind, which nature has given to man, must be intimately known; for all the force and art of speaking must be employed in allaying or exciting the feelings of those who listen. To this must be added a certain portion of grace and wit, learning worthy of a well-bred man, and quickness and brevity in replying as well as attacking, accompanied with a refined decorum and urbanity (10).

Cicero pulls clarity within the purview of knowledge, claiming that the “careful construction of words” assumes “knowledge of a vast number of things,” and he pulls appropriateness within the purview of propriety, claiming that a “portion of grace and wit” assumes a certain social refinement. A speaker’s sensitivity to the nuances of any social situation assumes good breeding. For Cicero, even stylistic plainness is an oratorical achievement entirely dependent on the orator’s clear and “careful construction of words,” which also requires a “knowledge of a vast number of things.”

While he does not cite Cicero by name, the learning Milton cites in his speech closely resembles the wisdom Cicero imparts in De Oratore. Milton is the very “aspirant to true, and not merely specious eloquence” that he introduces at the opening of his prolusion, and it is his prolusion that will ultimately demonstrate to his audience whether he is ready to advance to his Master’s degree. Following Cicero’s conception of the ideal orator, Milton claims that the truly eloquent speaker is “instructed and perfected in an all-around foundation in the all the arts and in every science.” His style is mature simply because his knowledge is vast. He has cultivated styles that suit the diverse subjects of his speech, and he shows an ability to turn from subject to subject
and style to style naturally. As both Cicero and Milton claim, stylistic propriety results from the speaker (or writer’s) sense of social propriety, which in turn results from a social sensitivity cultivated by “long and strenuous study” and “good breeding.” The “long and strenuous study” both orators advise—Cicero imparting his wisdom at the end of a long political career and Milton receiving this wisdom at the beginning of long writing career—reveals that stylistic propriety, and rhetorical propriety by extension, are both grounded in invention.

To achieve wisdom united with eloquence bespeaks a mind polymathic in its scope, yet sensitive to social niceties. The extraordinary “magnitude and difficulty” of the art of rhetoric derives precisely from the vast knowledge required for such an achievement, says Cicero (Watson 10). Milton adds his own rhetorical force to Cicero’s statements on the difficulties of invention, or rather the difficulty of judging and arranging the “wealth of material” at his disposal, when he says,

The truth is, my hearers, that—as I see it—the might of eloquence is best displayed on subjects which do not excite very great applause. Those which arouse the most applause can hardly by any means be kept within the limits of a speech. The very richness of the subject encumbers it and straitens and hedges the spreading parade of eloquence. My difficulty now is this wealth of material. The sinews of my war are my weakness; my arms make me harmless. And so a choice must be made, or surely the facts which establish and fortify my cause with strong defenses will have to be enumerated rather than elaborated. (623)\(^{114}\)

\(^{114}\) This chapter opens with a comment on Milton’s view of war and warfare, and as the many passages quoted in this chapter demonstrate, Milton quite often uses battle and war metaphors to convey his approach to the art of argument—that discourse should be disciplined and direct, and have both persuasive force and rigor in one’s search of truth. This approach is inherently Ramist in its orientation.
Milton views invention and disposition (or judgment)—Cicero’s first two canons of rhetoric—as the two most vital elements of eloquence, and yet these are the two that present the greatest difficulty to the orator. It is no surprise, then, that Ramus later comes to separate these elements from rhetoric and makes them a part of dialectical method; for wisdom carries persuasive force by itself, and if Milton’s prolusions are any indication of where he stands in this debate, a plain speech with a clear and effectively arranged argument makes the uniting of wisdom and eloquence redundant.

Like other Puritans of the period, Milton discovered in classical philosophy and rhetoric principles of logic and language theory that, removed from their pagan associations, advanced his and others’ agenda of religious reformation in England. As part of this complete reformation project, Milton sought educational reforms predicated on an interesting blending of classical and Christian ideals. In his treatise Of Education, for instance, Milton turns to humanist educational philosophy to outline the first of two objectives “concerning the best and noblest way of educati[ng]” English citizens (631). In accord with classical ideals, the first of Milton’s educational reforms is to inculcate students with a sense of civic responsibility that spans the different spheres of social engagement in which they might find themselves after graduation. It is the first duty of education, writes Milton, to “fit a man to perform justly, skillfully, and magnanimously all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war” (631). Milton is interested in “fitting” or “outfitting” a man for peace or war, and just as he had paired civic and military virtue in the prolusions he had delivered as student, Milton suggests that educators ought to observe the same pedagogical rigors when educating students in mind as they do when exercising the students in body.
Milton closes *Of Education* with an extended discussion of athletic exercise and the ideal physical education curriculum that would train students in the arts of swordplay, wrestling, and military strategy. Students educated in the discursive arts would be prepared to enter the professions of politics, law, and divinity, with their training in these arts readying them for “verbal quarreling.” Students educated in swordplay, wrestling, and military strategy would be prepared for physical combat. Although Milton despised violent action, he acknowledged the need for a strong and swift military if ever the nation found itself on the verge of war. Milton remarks that the ancients educated their youth with a strong sense of civic duty in order that they might call upon them in times of peace as well as in times of war. He notes that in his *Laws* Plato disapproves of the overemphasis on military training in Spartan education, but Milton also notes that Plato commends in the same passage the Spartans’ pairing of moral and military discipline. If the language arts sharpen the students’ sense of rhetorical and stylistic propriety, then military discipline reinforces their sense of ethical and moral propriety.

Logic teaches the students to think well, rhetoric to speak well, and grammar to write well, all being forms of verbal discipline. The literature the students read would teach them something of the good and afford them models for stylistic variation. Athletic exercises such as swordplay and wrestling not only condition the body to “keep [the students] healthy, nimble, strong and well in breath” (638), but also prepare them to answer the call to war if ever the need would arise. Milton would have his students prepared to make such an answer, having them frequently practice military exercises and

by a sudden alarum or watchword to be called out to their military motions,
under sky or covert according to the season, as was the Roman wont; first on foot, then, as their age permits, on horseback, to all the art of cavalry; that having
in sport, but with much exactness and daily muster, served out the rudiments of their soldiership in all the skill of embattling, marching, encamping, fortifying, besieging, and battering, with all the helps of ancient and modern stratagems, tactics, and warlike maxims, they may as it were out of a long war come forth renowned and perfect commander in the service of their country. (638)

The “exactness” or military discipline that Milton recommends for the students’ athletic exercise he also recommends for the students’ program of study in the liberal arts. Even if Milton truly thought violent action deplorable, as James Freeman argues in Milton and the Martial Muse when he writes that Paradise Lost “speaks against war with such learning, complexity and humanness that it still towers over other statements in our long Western tradition,” Milton still offers a very “regimented” course of liberal arts study in Of Education, in many places likening rhetoric and logic to military preparations and the course of study itself to well-ordered military ranks.

Rightly followed, Milton’s curriculum has the strength and force of Roman legion, whose vanguard, middle guard, and rearguard are positioned in the proper place, moving and working in concert at the proper moments, which is in fact the secret of the legion’s strength. As Milton writes,

In which methodical course it is so supposed that [the students] must proceed by the steady pace of learning onward, as at convenient times for memory’s sake to retire back into the middle ward, and sometimes into the rear of what they have been taught, until they have confirmed and solidly united the whole body of their perfected knowledge, like the last embattling of a Roman legion. (637)

Here Milton transitions from his discussion of the liberal arts curriculum to his discussion of military exercise and recreation. Whatever Milton’s thoughts on war might have been, he refers
often to the niceties of soldierly discipline to show that logical propriety and exactness in method are the aims of his educational program. His program would train the preacher, statesman, and poet as warriors, for like these other professions in times of peace and leisure, Milton understands that in times of war, the warrior’s duty is in the service of the republic. More important, however, is that in times of peace the preacher, statesman, and poet practice their respective arts with military precision. Having long studied the stratagems and practiced the many devices of their art, the preacher, statesman, and poet have come to understand the logic of their art and its service to the republic.

If the first of Milton’s objectives for educational reform in England focuses on the civic virtue students must practice in the public sphere in times of war or peace, then the second focuses on the religious doctrines upon which students must privately meditate that these doctrines might give shape and meaning to the practice of civic virtue. Christian principles thus come to inform classical virtues in Milton’s Christian-Humanist program of education, for the end of Milton’s educational program is that individual students will privately meditate on how they might “repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love Him, to be like Him, as we may the nearest by possessing our soul of true virtue” (631). In this way, logical propriety that is moral in its intent—“know[ing] God aright” and “possessing our soul of true virtue”—comes to shape ethical propriety—or the students’ practice of civic virtue and civic responsibility in whatever sphere of social engagement. Milton’s hope is to reform the nation so that the English people might realize their chosen place as modern-day Israelites and usher in Christ’s second coming. To arrive at moral and ethical propriety, however, students must be trained to properly think, speak, read, and write; that is to say, they must be inculcated in logical and rhetorical propriety during their instruction in the language arts.
Although Milton found much that was useful in classical rhetoric as it was theorized by Aristotle and practiced by Cicero, he advanced Ramist method in *Of Education*. Following Ramus’s pairing of invention and disposition, Milton considered the arrangement of discourse a direct result of its discovery and logical development. Only after the construction of the discourse did Milton find it appropriate to “clothe” the discourse in a fitting style, and even if he did not follow Ramus in severing invention and disposition as provinces of dialectic from elocution and delivery as provinces of rhetoric, nevertheless, he esteemed dialectic the *sine qua non* of any discourse. Milton seems to have embraced Aristotle’s likening of logic to a “contracted palm” and rhetoric to an “open hand,” metaphors he likely encountered in Cicero’s *De finibus* II, vi. Like Aristotle, Milton viewed dialectic and rhetoric as counterpart arts, but because he was also influenced by Ramus, Milton deemed logic a moment prior to and more important than rhetoric in the construction of discourse. For Milton, then, logical propriety precedes rhetorical propriety; indeed, rhetorical propriety results from logical propriety. Milton’s stress upon “right reason” in both his prose and poetry not only implies that reasoning “rightly” carries with it moral and ethical imperatives that rhetoricians have traditionally understood as resulting from the “ethical proof” or the speaker’s *ethos*, but also that these moral and ethical imperatives that inform “right reason,” which Milton also terms “conscience” in Chapter II of *De Doctrina Christiana*, show precisely where logical and ethical proofs can be said to overlap.

As a species of judgment, Ramist “method” comprises the arrangement of axioms or “that which is naturally precedent, most clear and well-known…such that it is placed in order and declaration as first, and whatever is more obscure follows after, and we [can then] judge completely of the order and of the confusion” (*Dial.* 55v). The dialectician is man’s proper place as a thinking, reasoning, and moral being, for in Ramus’s system, “human logic reaches its closest approximation to God’s logic at this point, in ‘method’” (Walton 159). As Walton argues,
The whole art of judgment, culminating in “method,” was not only the center of Ramus’ program for humane studies but was also “the chief instrument of man in the quest for salvation.” As early as 1543, Ramus had argued that his new logic could culminate in the individual’s realization of God’s logic, that the aim of logic was to be able to think in imitation of the way God thinks, to know and to act in imitation of the way He knows and acts. Ramus gradually developed this view to the point of considering philosophy as the way to develop “man’s divinity” (Dial., 64v). (159)

Much like Augustine’s baptism of Ciceronian rhetoric, Ramus reworked Socratic dialectic to Christian humanist ends. Walton offers an apt agricultural metaphor to illustrate the very end Ramus had in mind:

Insofar as man cultivates the created world by dialectical labor, repairing his postlapsarian forgetfulness by disciplined stages of access to the logic of God’s artifice, in that degree by which [writes Ramus] “man surpasses the beasts by syllogism, by that much do those who use method well, surpass other men: and man’s divinity stands out in no other part of reason so fully as it does in the sunlight of this universal [art of] judgment” (Dial., 64v). (159)

As Ramus understood his method, the dialectician practices the Adamic language, albeit in degraded form, as he works to recover lost Edenic knowing. His practice, as Walton illustrates it using an agricultural metaphor, is reminiscent of Milton’s description of Adam and Eve’s work in the garden:

On to their morning’s rural work they haste
Among sweet dews and flow'rs; where any row

Of fruit trees over-woody reached too far

Their pampered boughs, and needed hands to check

Fruitless embraces: *(Paradise Lost 5.211-15)*

Before the fall, Adam and Eve’s only labor was to “cultivate” the garden and check the growth of some plants in order to foster the growth of others. In so doing, their work imitated God’s work: His creation of the world out of chaos. Ramus understood his dialectical method as the mental labor needed to repair man’s fallen condition. Similar to the work of Milton’s prelapsarian man, the work of postlapsarian man, Ramus argued, is to cultivate the soil of his mind by constant practice. 115 Like Adam and Eve, he celebrates God’s works through his own work. Learning the “simple reasons” of things in the world is akin to digging in the soil to discover things’ causes, and the dialectical method he practices serves as a check against the kind of growth that obscures them.

In *Of Education* and other of his prose tracts, Milton advances the Ramist belief that man practices the language arts to cultivate his relationship with God, and Milton would also seem to embrace Ramus’ method for arriving at this

115 The web of relations or “tree structures” the dialectician generates by simple binary thinking can often be fascinatingly complex, and Ramus published visual representations of these trees in his treatises on dialectic. Interested as he is in departures from the living, spoken word, Walter Ong examines in *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* the “concept maps” that Ramus himself sketched to illustrate the simplicity of his dialectical method and the intricate patterns of thought it allows one to develop. Ong notes that in his invective against Aristotle, Ramus “frequently resorts to highly mythical self-dramatization, picturing dialectic as a tree of knowledge with golden apples hanging from the boughs (rami) surrounded by screeching and frustrated Aristotelian hobgoblins” (174). The image would certainly have endeared Ramus to the Puritans, for his very name suggests that in systematizing dialectical method, he has recovered part of the lost Adamic logic. In *The New England Mind*, Perry Miller notes the same in his discussion of Puritans’ embracing of Ramist logic, which they coupled with grace as the twofold means of regeneration and return to God from depravity.
The first law, *du tout* (of the whole) requires delimitation of the subject-matter by discerning those relationships (“links”) which set off a working whole from impertinent findings. The second law, *par soy* (by itself) focuses on correlation of variables as constitutive of the thing by itself. The culminating law, *universel premièrement* (primarily universal) seeks the highest level of intelligibility by coordination of relations of the first with those of the second level in order to bring out comprehensive “reciprocal” relationships. (Walton 158)

As an art of judgment, Ramist dialectic aims to bring order out of previously unordered materials by the dialectician’s first establishing limits between relevant and irrelevant materials to define more clearly the subject of his inquiry. The dialectician then proceeds to promote invention and discovery by identifying links, relationships, and reasons where he presently finds none. Finally, the dialectician arranges known relationships as axioms that he thereafter uses to light his way into increasingly obscure and unknown relationships. Ramus credits Plato’s Socrates for developing this particular method and cites *Philebus* as the text in which Socrates discusses the problem of inquiry into forms as dialectical wholes. Socrates advised that the dialectician proceed from a single form to a plurality of forms, and so make his way from the “definite” to the “indefinite” and by so doing become aware of the limits of his knowledge. Socrates had claimed that his own dialectical inquiry always proceeded from, or rather presupposed, his own ignorance, which put him in a position to interrogate subject matter that others deemed already settled and to distinguish more clearly the tentatively definite from the indefinite. With this method he sought to dismantle wholes into their constituent parts and reintegrate the parts to discover new wholes. In other words, dialectical method as Socrates posited it and Ramus advanced it was entirely *inventive* in its interrogation of established truths and its discovery of new truths.
Milton embraced Ramist logic in just this form: Invention addresses the questions the artist asks about the forms of things as he interrogates forms and processes by analysis. Judgment addresses the relationships among constituent parts of a thing or process arrived at by analysis. Method (or practice) addresses the positing of these relationships as axioms of artistic development. The artist proceeds thus from apprenticeship to increasing degrees of mastery, the same movement the classical pedagogues had advised—that one should slowly move his students from mimicry to creation, from imitation to originality. As one of the great polymaths of the period, Milton very early in his education recognized the need for students to read widely and variously before rendering critical judgment in any domain of knowledge. He writes in Of Education that it is “a preposterous exaction” of schoolmasters to force “the empty wits of children to compose themes, verses and orations, which are the acts of ripest judgment and the final work of a head filled by long reading and observing with elegant maxims and copious invention” (631). In the domain of Latin and Greek composition, for instance, Milton deplores “the ill habit which [the students] get of wretched barbarizing against the Latin and Greek idiom with their untutored Anglicanisms, odious to be read, yet not to be avoided without a well-continued and judicious conversing among pure authors digested, which they can scarce taste” (631). Without much reading and much practice, the student is ill-prepared to write anything of substance, much less write it well. It is Milton’s central point in Of Education, and Ronald Cooley’s suggestion in “Reformed Eloquence,” that a student of any art cultivates a discerning judgment and an ability to invent slowly and by degrees. Originality is only achieved through long practice and careful study of an art, by the student’s first consuming and slowly digesting the art’s model practitioners to glean the art’s underlying theories and general precepts by dialectical reasoning. In a move typical of Ramus, Milton emphasizes the importance of the student’s acquiring the ability to invent and judge appropriately before acquiring some sense of style and
taste. He thus privileges substance over style, or rather suggests that in suiting style to substance, the substance must be gotten first; otherwise the student is “learning mere words or such things chiefly as were better unlearned” (632).

Milton’s recommended curriculum for the language arts of grammar, logic, rhetoric, and poetics is that the student will learn them in this precise order. By grammar, of course, Milton means not only the study of words and their precise arrangement, but also the study of the choicest literature, which is how ancient grammarians taught their students both the words and their precise arrangement—that is, by looking to the best models of Greek and Latin eloquence. It would be a misreading of Milton’s chosen curriculum to conclude that he privileges style and stylistics in placing grammar first among the language arts, for like Ramus, Milton understood style as a species of rhetoric. But first he treats the universities’ “scholastic error” in prematurely throwing their students into logic without their having first a firm foundation in grammar:

And for the usual method of teaching arts, I deem it to be an old error of universities not yet well recovered from the scholastic grossness of barbarous ages, that instead of beginning with arts most easy—and those be such as are the most obvious to the sense—they present their young unmatriculated novices at first coming with the most intellective abstractions of logic and metaphysics. So that they having but newly left those grammatic flats and shallows where they stuck unreasonably to learn a few words with lamentable construction, and now on the sudden transported under another climate to be tossed and turmoiled with their unballasted wits in fathomless and unquiet deeps of controversy, do for the most part grow into hatred and contempt of learning, mocked and deluded all this
while with ragged notions and babblements, while they expected worthy and delightful knowledge…. (632)

The lack of preparation Milton here describes has far-reaching consequences. Students without adequate training in grammar possess neither words nor their precise arrangement, so that, Milton argues, they sound “barbarous” “with their ragged notions and babblements.” The alliteration, albeit bookending the passage, suggests that the students have not acquired sufficient mastery of the language(s) to express themselves well. Milton elevates the stylistic “barbarisms” to a moral concern he discovers in the unprepared students’ “babblements.” Because they have not yet gleaned enough wisdom and experience from their readings in the “grammatic flats and shallows” to navigate the “fathomless and unquiet deeps of [logical] controversy,” Milton claims, much like he did in the opening of his treatise, that such students cannot realize the goal of his educational program: “repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love Him, to be like Him.” Milton closes this paragraph revealing the social consequences of such ignorance:

[After inadequate training] poverty or youthful years [will] call them importunately their several ways and hasten them with the sway of friends either to an ambitious and mercenary, or ignorantly zealous divinity: some allured to the trade of law, grounding their purposes not on the prudent and heavenly contemplation of justice and equity which was never taught them, but on the promising and pleasing thoughts of litigious terms, fat contentions, and flowing fees: others betake them to state affairs with souls so unprincipled in virtue and true generous breeding that flattery and court shifts and tyrannous aphorisms appear to them the highest points of wisdom; instilling their barren hearts with a
conscientious slavery, if, as I rather think, it be not feigned. Others, lastly, of a
more delicious and airy spirit, retire themselves—knowing no better—to the
enjoyments of ease and luxury, living out their days in feast and jollity; which
indeed is the wisest and the safest course of all these, unless they were with more
integrity undertaken. (632)

Milton does not merely cite the three most popular professions chosen by those with university
training; he also suggests the three kinds of rhetorical training each of these professions calls for.
Ministers require some training in epideictic rhetoric if they are to move hearers by their
preaching. Lawyers require training in forensic rhetoric if they are to argue a case effectively.
Politicians require some training in deliberative rhetoric if they are to persuade people of the
commonwealth concerning certain state affairs. Milton cites these professions and suggests the
kind of rhetoric common to the practice of each but shows that he is less concerned with the form
and style this practice than the substance unprepared practitioners have missed during their
university training: the minister, true divinity; the lawyer, prudence, justice, and equity; the
politician, principled action, the marks of good breeding and freedom. These virtues are the
“substance” of each art for Milton, seemingly lost upon the student when they sink beneath the
“fathomless and unquiet deeps of [logical] controversy.” Wiser, says Milton, for such men to
“retire themselves” entirely from public life and civic duty.

Milton not only places logic at the center of the language arts curriculum, couching it
between grammar and rhetoric, he also makes it a necessary precursor to the “organic arts” of
rhetoric and poetry. Before a student is ready to compose original work, he will have had to have
read widely and variously among the literary models and have extracted and mastered the art. As
Milton writes,
And now, lastly, will be the time to read with them those organic arts which enable men to discourse and write perspicaciously, elegantly, and according to the fitted style of lofty, mean, or lowly. Logic, therefore, so much as is useful, is to be referred to this due place with all her well-couched heads and topics, until it be time to open her contracted palm into a graceful and ornate rhetoric, taught out of the rule of Plato, Aristotle, Phalereus, Cicero, Hermogenes, Longinus. To which poetry would be made subsequent, or indeed rather precedent, as being less subtle and fine, but more simple, sensuous, and passionate. I mean not here the prosody of a verse, which they could not but have hit on before among the rudiments of grammar; but that sublime art which in Aristotle’s Poetics, in Horace, and the Italian commentaries of Castelvetro, Tasso, Mazzoni, and others, teaches what the laws are of a true epic poem, what of a dramatic, what of a lyric, what decorum is, which is the grand masterpiece to observe. (636-37)

As a matter of course, Milton claims in this passage that “so much as is useful,” logic precedes the “organic arts” of rhetoric and poetry. In this he follows Ramus, who privileged the “contracted palm” of dialectic as the art that grasped the true substance of a thing before its presentation in the “open hand” of rhetoric. “When Milton wrote these words,” notes Merritt Hughes, “he may already have been at work on his textbook of logic for his own pupils, Artis logicae Plenior Institutio, which was an independent development of the French logician, Peter Ramus, as Milton chose to qualify them in light of his knowledge of classical logic” (636). Milton’s reference to logic as a “contracted palm” and to rhetoric as an “open hand” is Aristotle’s comparison, but Milton’s qualification of Ramist logic in light of classical logic shows that he esteemed “her well-couched heads and topics” as having much greater import for discourse than they had traditionally been treated in the classical rhetorical canon of invention. Following
Ramus, Milton wished to elevate logic to its “due place” among the language arts. His appeal in this passage to the *propriety* of logic among the other language arts is further supported by his appeal to stylistic propriety, or the ability of “men to discourse and write perspicaciously, elegantly, and according to the fitted style of lofty, mean, and lowly,” and generic propriety, or “what the laws are of a true epic poem, what of a dramatic, what of a lyric, what decorum is, which is the grand masterpiece to observe.”

That Milton views the student’s mastery of dialectic as logically precedent to, and arguably more important than, the student’s mastery of rhetoric and poetics is significant not merely for the would-be poet or literary critic, but also for the other professions for which the student undergoes university training. For the would-be poet or critic, a keen sense of stylistic propriety and literary decorum grounded in logic means that the student has developed literary taste and discerning aesthetic sensibilities: “This [sense of decorum],” writes Milton, “would make them soon perceive what despicable creatures our common rhymers and play-writers be, and show them what religious, what glorious and magnificent use might be made of poetry, both in divine and human things” (637). The language arts do not just prepare students for a life of writing, however elevated its use, but also for the other professions for which, Milton claims, the students’ premature entrance into the thickets of logical controversy has ruined. A proper course, which begins with the reading of literature, focuses on the study of logic, and closes with rhetorical and poetic composition, sufficiently readies students with all the virtues necessary to succeed in their chosen profession. Milton closes his recommended curriculum with this final comment:

From hence, and not till now, will be the right season of forming them to be able writers and composers in every excellent matter, when they shall be thus fraught
with an universal insight into things. Or whether they be to speak in parliament
or council, honor and attention would be waiting on their lips. There would then
also appear in pulpits other visages, other gestures, and stuff otherwise wrought
than what we now sit under, oftimes to as great a trial of our patience as any
other that they preach to us. (637)

Many of the changes Milton foresees resulting from a proper university education at first glance
appear to be the stuff of rhetoric: the parliamentary speaker’s command of his audience and the
preacher’s striking the proper cast and appearance before his congregation. And yet, prior and
proper to these images he envisions, Milton clearly states that the “forming” of these students into
“able writers and composers in every excellent matter” only happens when they are “thus fraught
with an universal insight into things.” This “universal insight” to which Milton here appeals is the
very same insight he says the present professional world lacks and society therefore suffers from
when university students study logic without sufficient preparation: ministers with “an ambitious
and mercenary, or ignorantly zealous divinity,” lawyers without “prudent and heavenly
contemplation of justice and equity,” politicians with “souls . . . unprincipled in virtue and true
generous breeding” (632). Milton thus bases his “universal insight” into the virtues inherent in the
arts, begotten by long practice at the “right season,” on the student’s mastery of artistic method—
which is the study of logic in any case—and his right recognition of the materials of his art, his
art’s relationship to the other arts, and the goods or benefits his art provides in the service of his
fellow man. In short, Milton’s “universal insight into things” is dialectical method in the Ramist
sense.
Whether Milton’s early Ramism persists into his more mature prose and poetry has been a subject of much critical debate. His most mature prose work, and the one of which he was most proud, *De Doctrina Christiana*, reveals a Ramist in the invention and arrangement of the argument. His most mature poems, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, reveal an aspiring orator who never quite forgot the sentiment he expressed in “Learning Makes Men Happier than Does Ignorance,” that it behooves a poet just as much as it behooves an “aspirant to true, and not to merely specious eloquence, to be instructed and perfected in an all-around foundation in the all the arts and in every science.” Rhetorical and poetical heights are reached only by “long and strenuous study.” As with many other of his prose tracts, Milton organizes *De Doctrina Christiana* under different headings that he takes as different subjects of inquiry. His division of the subject of Christian doctrine into different heads, which he in turn divides into what is known and what is unknown, in order that what is unknown can be explored at greater length, is typical of Ramist dialectical method. Examples of Milton’s use of Ramist definitional logic abound in *De Doctrina*, so one instance will suffice to demonstrate Milton’s division of his heading into two subheadings, the second of which he defers in order to treat the first at greater length. This binary method of development and disposition becomes for Milton the most effective and efficient means of exploring his subject fully. That he thought *De Doctrina* his capital achievement shows that Milton’s prose style matured into Ramism, as, among others, Chapter III “Of the Divine Decrees” illustrates:

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117 In the prefatory epistle to *De Doctrina Christiana*, Milton refers to the work as his “best and richest possession” (901).
Hitherto I have considered that knowledge of God which is to be obtained from his nature. That which is derived from his efficiency is the next subject of inquiry.

The EFFICIENCY of God is either INTERNAL or EXTERNAL.

The INTERNAL EFFICIENCY of God is that which is independent of all extraneous agency. Such are his decrees. Eph. i. 9. which he hath purposed in himself.

The DECrees of God are GENERAL or SPECIAL. God’s GENERAL DECREE is that WHEREBY HE HAS DECREEd FROM ALL ETERNITY OF HIS OWN MOST FREE AND WISE AND HOLY PURPOSE, WHATEVER HE WILLED, OR WHATEVER HE WAS HIMSELF ABOUT TO DO. (911)

Milton’s prose style is plain and direct. The binary logic he uses to develop and arrange the subject of his inquiry is disciplined and rigorous. His writing strategy, which comes from the Greek word for “soldier” (Gr. στρατιωτής), is to develop his topic using Ramist method.118

118 Tamara Goeglein argues in her essay “Wherein hath Ramus been so offensious?: Poetic Examples in the English Ramist Logic Manuals (1574-1672)” that a semiotic analysis of Ramist dialectic reveals that the strict classical distinction between logical and poetic discourse is not as stable as it has been traditionally held. Goeglein cites Milton’s Art of Logic, claiming that “[a]s a poet and a Ramist, [Milton] offers what I believe is a way to understand Ramus’ use of poetry from a semiotic approach while preserving the integrity of Ramist Protestant metaphysics” (97). Milton makes evident in this treatise on logic how the rational mind functions logically and poetry at one and the same moment. Goeglein states, Milton articulates the workings of judgment which, from a semiotic perspective, likewise articulates how Ramist disposition generally operates on metonyms (created in invention) to create metaphors of judgment. Judgment is metaphorical apprehension, metaphorical not in an aesthetic sense alone but in a semiotic sense more generally. These metaphors substitute one semantic entity for another based on a principle of similarity; this similarity, as will become apparent, arises not from a resemblance in the presumed referents but instead from a resemblance created in invention. An act of understanding, of recognizing a similarity, is thus construed as a sign of God’s Truth by Ramists, and Milton can serve to show us why this is so. (97) Goeglein points out that Milton observed the Protestant poetic convention that God is the “efficient source of all art” and “author of all wisdom,” which echoes Ramus’ understanding of the art of dialectic as not
Milton’s prose thus marches along in neatly ordered columns, disposed with near-military precision. Because he is dealing with matters of doctrine in this text, Milton’s plain and direct style, which he punctuates with Scriptural references in key places to support his definitional logic, suits is rhetorical purpose: to instruct his readers on matters of church doctrine. It is only fitting then that concise definitional statements dominate Milton’s work, for his precise style shows mental and methodological clarity. When writing on matters of church doctrine, Milton shows that discursive and methodological clarity abet rhetorical propriety.

Milton arrived at discursive and methodological clarity after much rigorous study and self-examination. Largely to profit his readers, Milton shares in the prefatory epistle to *De Doctrina* that, as a young boy, he began earnest study of the Scriptures in their original languages. He then proceeded to read some of the shorter theological systems and following the example of these writers, began “classing under certain heads whatever passages of Scripture occurred for extraction, to be made use of hereafter or as occasion might require” (901). From the shorter theological systems, Milton moved to larger volumes of divinity, paying particular attention to how these writers marshaled Scripture to prove their arguments. Milton discovered only the key to all arts but also the way God himself thinks. Goeglein cites a passage from Milton’s *Art of Logic* to demonstrate Milton’s inherently Ramist conception of all artistic production. Milton writes that Their [logicians’] way of discovery was much like the procedure in painting. For, just as in a picture there are two things, the subject or primary model and the art of painting, so in the discovery of an art, the natural use and the example of skilled men corresponds to the primary model, and logic corresponds to the art of the painter—natural logic, at least, for this is the faculty itself of reason in the human mind, according to the common saying that art imitates nature. (97) Milton’s analogy offers *imitatio* as the methodology artists and logicians alike use in the practice of their art. Goeglein notes that the analogy takes the form of a syllogism: art imitates nature; logic is an art; therefore, logic imitates nature. Following Ramus, Milton takes the syllogism a step further, suggesting that the art of logic is not merely natural or natural to human reasoning, but logical expressions are an expression of the mind of God much like the created world is an expression of the mind—or Word—of God.

119 Early in his writing career—to which his *Prolusions* attest—Milton had been deeply concerned with the kind of breadth of learning that would answer to various speaking occasions. To meet the needs of kairotic propriety, Milton followed Cicero in recommending vast knowledge in various arts. In other words, Milton embraced Cicero’s notion of the “perfect” or “complete” orator whose vast knowledge affords him the authority to speak on a number of subjects and respond appropriately to various speaking occasions. Such vast knowledge affords the speaker (or writer) the materials with which to invent broadly.
that many of the conflicting arguments in the theological controversies over certain matters of faith were either uncharitable or evasive in their intent:

But, to speak the truth with freedom as well as candour, I was concerned to discover in many instances adverse reasonings either evaded by wretched shifts, or attempted to be refuted, rather speciously than with solidity, by an affected display of formal sophisms, or by a constant recourse to the quibbles of the grammarians; while what was most pertinaciously espoused as the true doctrine, seem often defended, with more vehemence than strength of argument, by misconstructions of Scripture, or by the hasty deduction of erroneous inferences. Owing to these causes, the truth was sometimes as strenuously opposed as if it had been an error or a heresy—while errors and heresies were substituted for the truth, and valued rather from deference to custom and the spirit of party than from the authority of Scripture. (901)

Early in his study of theological controversy Milton recognized the “merely customary” reading as an empty ethical appeal. He was also not taken in by the “vehement” defense and the strong emotional appeal such defense requires. Milton understood the strength of the logical appeal and the force of a clear and convincing argument filled with rightly-handled Scriptural references. The Scriptures require no authority beyond themselves; rather, they lend authority to arguments that bring their meaning to light. Milton’s method, then, is twofold: First, he recommends “right reason” as an appropriate approach to theological controversy. Second, he appeals to the Scriptures as the only authority appropriate for arguments made in theological controversy.

Milton thus advances two kinds of propriety thinking in his prefatory epistle. The complexity of Milton’s notion of “right reason” or ratio recta warrants further discussion, but it
can be summed up as reason suffused with faith. Milton agreed with the Cambridge Platonists that reason and faith differ only slightly from one another, that if, as Thomas Hobbes had posited, man’s reason is “the candle of the Lord,” then that candle sheds light in proportion to man’s degree of faith. Like St. Augustine, Milton developed his theological system, as well as his ethical and aesthetic awareness, from a rhetoric of propriety grounded in proportional logic. Also like Augustine, Milton understood the Holy Spirit as the sole proprietor of meaning. Milton follows Augustine in arguing that man’s reason is contingent upon his faith, and that man’s faith is contingent upon the influx of the Holy Spirit into his heart. Milton closes his prefatory epistle encouraging his readers to read *De Doctrina Christiana* in this very light: “Assess this work as God’s spirit shall direct you. Do not accept or reject what I say unless you are absolutely convinced by the clear evidence of the Bible” (Norton 401). The reader’s conviction, says Milton, will result from his ability to see clear evidence of Milton’s arguments in the Holy Scriptures; however, the reader’s sight is cleared or clouded by the proportion of his faith, the force of his inspiration.

By relying on the clarity and weight of Scriptural evidence, Milton deploys the same argumentative strategies that he learned in the academic debates. In theological controversy, however, one cannot stand on reason alone to make his case, and indeed, in *De Doctrina*, Milton is arguing about matters of faith. His notion of right reason accounts for both. In his argument about the existence of God, for example, Milton distinguishes “right” reason from “discursive” reason to show that even as God overwhelms man’s limited understanding, God does offer glimpses of himself that man can comprehend:

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120 See Chapter 1, especially my discussion of Augustine’s developing theory of proper proportions from *On the Beautiful and the Fitting* to *Confessions* and *On Christian Doctrine*. 
Our safest way [says Milton] is to form in our minds such a conception of God, as shall correspond with his own delineation and representation of himself in the sacred writings. For granting that both in the literal and figurative descriptions of God, he is exhibited not as he really is, but in such a manner as may be within the scope of our comprehensions, yet we ought to entertain such a conception of him, as he, in condescending to accommodate himself to our capacities, has shewn that he desires we should conceive. For it is on this very account that he lowered himself to our level, lest in our flights above the reach of human understanding, and beyond the written word of Scripture, we should be tempted to indulge in vague cogitations and subtleties. (905)

Milton views the authority of Scripture as both the means by which man may contemplate heaven and a check against flying too high. This Scriptural check against man’s “scholastic” inclination to “indulge in vague cogitations and subtleties” is Ramist in its orientation and intent. Milton here embraces Ramus’s belief in dialectic as an approximation of God’s creation. Just as God created order from chaos and confusion, so does the dialectician when he separates “that which is naturally precedent, most clear and well-known . . . such that it is placed in order and declaration as first, and whatever is more obscure follows after, [so that he can then] judge completely of the order and of the confusion” (Dial. 55v). To practice dialectical method is to think as God thinks; or rather, to practice dialectical method is to do as God has done. Man’s recreation is to reflect (upon) God’s creation, to glean the order and arrangement of God’s artifice, to celebrate the creator. That faith directs man’s thoughts in this enterprise makes his reasoning capacity “rightly” oriented, his thoughts, words, and works all aligned toward developing “man’s divinity” (Dial., 64v). In this way, Milton grounds his notion of right reason squarely in Ramist logic, for dialectical method, which is the method by which man separates order from chaos that he may
see the world clearly and render judgments about it rightly and righteously, serves as Milton’s method for achieving discursive clarity and propriety.

Milton once more accepts the Ramist and Socratic position that dialectical method assumes ignorance as the starting point of any investigation, or rather that dialectical method is designed to bring to light one another’s ignorance. The dialectician separates the known from the unknown, moving by degrees in his propositional logic from axioms to uncertainty. The uncertainty that always hovers at the margins of man’s limited knowledge about the world Milton and Ramus both trace to man’s fall from grace, which revealed that man could not stand on reason alone:

It was necessary [Milton writes] that something should be forbidden or commanded as a test of fidelity, and that an act in its own nature indifferent, in order that man’s obedience might be thereby manifested. For since it was the disposition of man to do what was right, as a being naturally good and holy, it was not necessary that he should be bound by the obligation of a covenant to perform that to which he was of himself inclined; nor would he have given any proof of obedience by the performance of works to which he was led by a natural impulse, independently of the divine command. (993)

Milton takes pains to show against his Catholic opponents that God’s requirement for Adam was not a covenant of works, but rather a test of faith, for God required Adam’s obedience, not his action. Infused with God’s spirit, Adam was naturally disposed to do what was right, though “free to fall.” His faith in God failed when he relied upon knowledge of evil to know good, and by that good to know God.
By failing God’s test of his fidelity, Adam also lost that portion of his reason that brought him close to God. Adam’s failure is not merely a failure of faith, but also a failure of reason, which Milton shows in his discussion of both faith and reason—that faith and reason differ only in degree. Of God’s postlapsarian commandments and man’s postlapsarian faith, Milton writes,

> It was fitting and highly agreeable to reason, that what was the first and consequently the greatest commandment, scrupulous obedience to which was required by God even from the lowest of all the people, should be delivered in so plain a manner, that nothing ambiguous or obscure in its terms could lead his worshippers into error, or keep them in suspense of doubt. (909)

In this passage about the first commandment of the Decalogue, Milton slides between reason and faith, arguing that man’s faith in God—the first and plainest of God’s commandments—fittingly and reasonably resulted from Adam’s disobedience. The stylistic propriety with which the commandment is written suits the social and religious propriety the commandment demands. Since God commands faith, it is only fitting that his commandment be written in a style that leaves little margin for error and doubt.

Milton’s emphasis on the stylistic plainness of the Decalogue suggests that logic, not rhetoric, is the language art that approaches the ideal of linguistic transparency, in which a speaker’s words perfectly suit his thoughts, and that it is logic that allows him to judge of his and others’ words and actions rightly. “Right reason” implies the precise exercise of a proper logic, a form of moral and ethical propriety grounded in logical propriety. Aristotle approached phronesis (i.e. “rhetorical prudence” or “practical wisdom”) in much the same way as Milton approaches “right reason”—simultaneously as a rhetorical faculty by which a speaker finds the most appropriate discourse in any situation and an ethical capacity to act with a mind toward human
goods. The prudent or ideal orator, then, is the man who not only recognizes the good, but also finds the most fitting words to move others to the good. Yet Aristotle also acknowledged that rhetorical propriety, which induces the hearers’ sympathy, very often gives the mere appearance of truth:

Appropriate style also makes the fact appear credible; for the mind of the hearer is imposed upon [paralogizetai—will draw a wrong conclusion or logical error] under the impression that the speaker is speaking the truth, because, in such circumstances, his feelings are the same, so that he thinks (even if it is not the case as the speaker puts it) that things are as he represents them; and the hearer always sympathizes with one who speaks emotionally, even though he really says nothing. This is why speakers often confound their hearers by mere noise.  

(1408a10-25, qtd. in McKenna 38)

In several of his prose tracts, Milton rails against the rhetoric of his opponents, calling it noise, confusion, “babble” or “Babel” because it evokes sympathy by its semblance of truth. Milton certainly understood the importance of rhetoric in one’s mastery of the language arts, but he deemed logic the medium of truth and advanced logical propriety—“right reason” or “conscience”—as proof of the very existence of God. He writes in Chapter II of De Doctrina, for instance, that

the existence of God is further proved by that feeling, whether we term it conscience, or right reason, which even in the worst of characters is not altogether extinguished. If there were no God, there would be no distinction between right and wrong; the estimate of virtue and vice would entirely depend on the blind opinion of men; no one would follow virtue, no one would be
restrained from vice by any sense of shame, or fear of the laws, unless conscience
or right reason did from time to time convince every one, however unwilling, of
the existence of God, the Lord and ruler of all things, to whom, sooner or later,
each must give an account of his own actions, whether good or bad. (905)

This capacity to know right from wrong, “not altogether extinguished” “even in the worst of
characters,” is man’s inherent ability to judge his and others’ thoughts, words, and actions rightly.
Although Milton admits that right reason or conscience is innate, he adds that man exercises this
capacity in proportion to his faith in God and his Scriptures. By itself, reason is insufficient, for
“[n]o one,” writes Milton “can have right thoughts of God, with nature or reason alone as his
guide, independent of the word, or message of God” (905). Reason must be mixed with the
proper proportion of faith. Or rather, without faith, one cannot act reasonably.

Milton had very early in his prose-writing career developed a sense of literary propriety
that, as Irene Samuel has argued in “The Development of Milton’s Poetics,” was grounded in
literary variety. Though Samuel argues that Milton’s concept of decorum did not entirely square
with Aristotle’s notion of to prepon or Cicero’s notion of decorum, these concepts of decorum did
indeed influence his own. First, among them was Aristotle’s understanding of the ethos, which
Milton also found in the logic of the speech or writing itself. For Milton, a speaker or writer’s
credibility was directly contingent upon the clarity or logic of his argument, and Milton later
elevated clear, rational thinking conveyed through a plain and easy style from an ethical concern
to a moral concern inasmuch as it reflects the supremely ordered and rational mind of God.
Second among the classical concepts of decorum that Milton embraced was Cicero’s notion of the
complete or perfect orator, whose vast knowledge of various arts affords him the authority to
speak or write on a number of subjects and the wherewithal to speak or write in response to a number of occasions.

Critics have characterized Milton as one of the period’s last great polymaths largely because Milton envisioned himself as a complete orator. He read widely in various arts that he might broadly invent on any topic or theme, though he imagined the place of a poet in the service of the republic, much like a soldier. Milton thus embraced a classical understanding of an orator, one who is part statesman or politician, but he Christianizes the concept, adding to it the part of the minister whose rhetoric addresses the state of men’s relationship to God in order that English citizens might form a more perfect union under God. Such variety of purpose does have a clearly defined order, however: Milton argued for a Christian-Humanist program of study in which students would read widely to acquire the knowledge necessary to invent properly, using Ramist method to isolate knowns from unknowns as students clarified their understanding of the world and their place in it. Milton everywhere likens logic to military discipline and its practice to military exercise, for it readies the student for professional service to the state. This “closed hand” of logic would then “open” to the arts of presentation, first among them rhetoric, which prepared students for their professional lives in politics, law, or divinity. The truly talented student who demonstrated a facility with language might become a poet, but for Milton, poets ought to be a rarity. Their service to the state encapsulates the professional lives of the politician, minister, and soldier. Only the polymath whose thinking approximates the thinking of the mind of God can move a nation of readers to adopt the “right reason” necessary to see their place in the divine plan as God sees it. Milton writes Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained to model just this kind of thinking in the ministry of Christ, a perfect orator whose knowledge of the Scriptures and supremely rational mind truly reflects the mind of God.
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Chapter 5, Part 2

“To every thing there is a season”:

Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and the Failure of Kairotic Propriety

“War then, war / Open or understood must be resolved” (1.661-62) declares Satan to the rebellious host on the shores of the lake of fire, where the fallen angels regroup just after their military defeat in heaven. Confounded after their fall, Satan is first to regain his senses and quickly marshals his army to assess the damage and deliberate upon their best course of action. In short time, Pandemonium is constructed and Satan convenes his demonic council. End of Book I.

Following classical epic convention, Milton opens Book 1 of *Paradise Lost* in medias res, conflating the fate of a routed army—the subject with which Virgil opens the *Aeneid*—with a warriors’ council—the subject with which Homer opens the *Iliad*. Unlike Virgil, Milton presents an army fallen rather than in flight, but no less in need of a new purpose. Unlike Homer, Milton presents a warriors’ council whose members are not at odds: “O shame to men!” writes Milton. “Devil with Devil damn’d / Firm concord holds, men onely disagree / Of creatures rational” (2.496-98). Though it was not his express purpose in *Paradise Lost* to sing of “warfare and a man at war,” as Virgil had in the *Aeneid*, or to sing of “the anger of Achilles who sent so many men to their death,” as Homer had in the *Iliad*, Milton does indeed sing of war in both *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, only his war becomes a spiritual war, and military conquest becomes a verbal contest.\(^{121}\)

Milton sings instead of man’s fall from grace, “till one greater Man / Restore us” (1.4-

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\(^{121}\) In his book *Milton and the Martial Muse*, James Freeman argues that Milton presents his Satan of *Paradise Lost* as a conventional martial hero only to deconstruct the convention and show that patient words win greater glory than military might. Freedman claims that Milton’s poem “speaks against war with such learning, complexity and humanness that it still towers over other statements in our long Western
5). Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* focus less upon war than upon patient and obedient discourse as the means by which man might contemplate God and recover something of his former glory. Man’s patience and obedience are not without their trials, however, which Milton dramatizes in the person of Christ as his model of perfect or right reasoning, for even in the midst of argument, which Milton so often likens to warfare, Christ observes the Word of God as his sole source of logical and rhetorical propriety.

Milton’s express purpose in both *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* is to refashion the conventional epic argument. Late in *Paradise Lost*, for example, Milton reveals that his intention is not to sing of “Wars, hitherto the only argument / Heroic deemed, chief mastery to dissect /

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Wars, hitherto the only argument

Heroic deemed, chief mastery to dissect

With long and tedious havoc fabled knights

In battles feigned; the better fortitude

Of patience and heroic martyrdom

Unsung. (9.28-33)

Milton sings neither of the anger of Achilles and the souls he sent to Hades nor of arms and Juno’s unrelenting hate. Milton invents outside the typical epic conventions and sings instead of “the better fortitude / Of patience and heroic martyrdom.” At first sight, “patience tried” is neither an epic topic nor terribly exciting, certainly not as exciting as military conquest, feats of arms, and terrors on the open sea. This is not to say that Milton does not make war a subject in his epic, for Robert Fallon contends that the war in heaven in Book Six of *Paradise Lost* is “in the classic tradition of Homer and Virgil” and John Coffey points out that “of the poem’s ten thousand lines, nine hundred are devoted to actual battle” (Fallon 119; Coffey 157). When one couples Satan’s review of his fallen force in Book One and the demonic military council he convenes in Book Two, Coffey concludes that “around a quarter of *Paradise Lost* concerns war in the widest sense” (157). And yet much in the poem—nearly nine tenths or three quarters by Coffey’s estimation—carries the same force as Book Six and is no less “epic” in its ability to excite the reader. The virtues of passivity and patience, love and obedience, which Milton commends as better than the martial virtues, he dramatizes in dialogue rather than in action, the military contest largely giving way in his epic to the mental contest. It is through mental might and verbal dexterity that the poem’s heroes show their virtue. Milton’s famous comment on the epic tradition does less to confirm that he was dismissive of the virtues of militancy than to suggest that he privileged the discursive arts to the art of war.
With long and tedious havoc fabled knights / In battles feigned,” but rather to sing of “the better fortitude / Of patience and heroic martyrdom / Unsung” (9.28-33). And at the opening of *Paradise Regained*, Milton once more invokes his muse “to tell of deeds / Above Heroic, though in secret done, / And unrecorded left through many an Age, / Worthy t’ have not remain’d so long unsung” (1.14-17). Milton’s refashioning of the classical epic argument amounts to a refashioning of literary decorum. Much like St. Augustine’s “baptism” of classical rhetoric for Christian ends, Milton appropriates the classical epic argument only to invert (or rather convert) it. Milton’s Christian epics convert the classical heroic virtues to reveal a sense of stylistic, rhetorical, social and economic propriety that literally turns propriety in a classical sense on its head. The classical, heroic virtues, which tell us something of man’s active, political life give way to the Christian virtues, which tell us something of man’s contemplative, private life.

The prefatory material of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* introduces readers to other writers’ concerns with stylistic, rhetorical, social and economic propriety. Andrew Marvell’s prefatory poem “On *Paradise Lost*” treats the literary decorum of Milton’s choice of epic subject. For the Biblicist who deemed the Scriptures whole and divinely inspired, far above any secular writer’s power to add or detract, Milton’s narrative of the angels’ apostasy and fall and its reflection in man’s disobedience and loss of paradise was not merely “bold,” as Marvell argues, but bordering on blasphemy. Marvell begs the “Mighty Poet” to pardon his “causeless, yet not impious, surmise” (lines 23-24) that “none will dare / Within thy Labours to pretend a share” (lines 25-26). Marvell’s explicit appeal to the work’s stylistic propriety in the lines that follow belies his suggestion of the work’s social and religious impropriety—that Milton has profaned the Holy Scriptures by inventing his epic’s argument from their pages—and yet Marvell also argues that Milton’s keen sense of literary decorum has left little room in his epic for other poets to invent upon, much less imitate, his work:
Thou hast not miss’d one thought that could be fit,
And all that was improper dost omit:
So that no room is here for Writers left,
But to detect their Ignorance or Theft. (lines 27-30)

Marvell discusses stylistic propriety in terms of logical invention in these lines, seeing the poem much like Milton himself would have seen it. Rhetorical and poetical style follows as a function of logical invention, much like Milton’s rhetorical and poetical presentation of the subject of each Book in *Paradise Lost* follows his plain, prose-rendering of each Book’s “argument” and the epic’s express purpose: “That to the highth of this great Argument / I may assert Eternal Providence, / And justify the ways of God to men” (1.24-26). Marvell’s appeal to

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122 See Chapter 5, Part 1, “The ‘Contracted Palm’ to the ‘Open Hand’” for a fuller treatment of Milton’s argument that the study of logic ought to precede the study rhetoric and poetics in the reformed curriculum he outlines in *Of Education*. John Major contends in his essay “Milton’s View of Rhetoric” that Milton’s view of logic as more “basic” than rhetoric was indicative of English Renaissance pedagogy more generally:

> We need to consider [says Major] the relationship in Milton’s time between rhetoric, the art of expression, and the second of the basic arts, logic, the art of thought. Actually, logic in the English Renaissance was ‘a theory not so much of thought as of statement,’ being the means of communication within the world of learning, as rhetoric was the means of communication between the learned and the popular world. In a sense poetry was held to be the third great form of communication, sharing characteristics of both logic and rhetoric. (687)

Major thus argues that Milton had merely internalized and rearticulated in *Of Education* the English Renaissance view that logic is foundational to all communication, rhetorical, prosaic, or poetic, and that in this sense Milton can synthesize the classical, Ciceronian rhetorical canons of invention and disposition as logically prior to the canons of style and delivery and the Ramist reconfiguration of invention and disposition as faculties of logic and judgment (i.e. dialectic) rather than as canons of rhetoric.

123 Milton’s “rhetoric of plainness” is at once Milton’s application of Cicero’s imperative that the oratorical office of “teaching” requires plain style and Milton’s imitation of the Biblical rhetoric, Paul characterizes in his epistles when he urges Christian preachers to open the Word to their hearers by stylistic plainness. As any Puritan preacher would, Milton makes clear to his readers both the argument of *Paradise Lost* as a whole and the arguments of the respective books therein. In his essay “‘Plain’ and ‘Ornate’ Styles and the Structure of *Paradise Lost,*” Peter Berek argues that the same is also true of Milton’s careful treatment of Christian doctrine at various places in the epic, and especially during the discourse between the Father and Son in the Heaven scene of Book III. Berek states that the peculiarly stark and ‘unpoetic’ expositions of doctrine in the opening episodes of Book III give the fit audience of *Paradise Lost* standards for the use of language indispensable for the proper
the poem’s stylistic propriety in his prefatory poem also suggests economic propriety in that no author will “pretend a share” in Milton’s “Labours,” for the “Theft” would be all too apparent. Milton stands alone as sole proprietor of an epic argument so deliberately invented within the interstices of Scripture that few would dare follow him. Suggested in Marvell’s lines is that Milton’s authority amounts to audacity, as even Milton himself argues at the opening of Book 1 in his invocation of his epic Muse, “I thence / Invoke thy aid to my advent’rous Song, / That with no middle flight intends to soar” (1.12-14). Readers cannot miss the allusion to Icarus’ flight and later fall, which Milton claims as the substance of his poetic project, “while it pursues / Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhyme” (1.15-16). Logical, rhetorical, and stylistic inventiveness are what Milton is after in Paradise Lost, presenting the argument and style of his epic as original as Daedalus’ creation and as bold as Icarus’ flight.

The tenor of Marvell’s prefatory poem changes in its latter half, where Marvell elevates Milton to a prophet through whom God “Draws the Devout” and “deter[s] the Profane” (line 32). Milton’s invocation of his epic Muse renders him an instrument of God’s Word and work, which Marvell touches upon in his poem when he refers to Milton’s “flight” not as the ambitious flight and later fall of Icarus, as the classical allusion bears out, but rather as the “soft” soaring of the Bird of Paradise, whose flight like Milton’s song “never flags, but always keeps on Wing” (line 40). Marvell argues that it is Milton’s reverence for the “things divine” of which he “treat’st” in the poem so that he “them preserves, and thee, inviolate” (lines 33-34) that changes the entire response to the more immediately attractive parts of the poem. Milton’s choice of the contrast between ‘plain’ and ‘ornate’ styles as a way of making perceptible the difference between perfection and imperfection, innocence and sinfulness, can be explained and, in a sense, “justified” by the sensitivity to rhetorical distinctions the poet could expect from a mid-seventeenth-century audience. (237)

Berek references Milton’s formulation of his readers as a “fit audience . . . though few” (7.31) to point out that Milton himself “fit” his audience by laying down fine doctrinal points as the key to properly interpreting his characters’ different uses of rhetoric in the epic. Milton’s own words thus suggest that he was interested in teaching his readers to read the epic with a sense of rhetorical propriety.
tenor of Marvell’s perception of Milton’s project. Milton’s sense of stylistic propriety and literary
decorum save his epic argument from the taint of ambition and the stain of sin. In fact, Marvell
equates Milton’s poetics with the rhetoric of prophesy, making Milton just one more of God’s
prophets whose words are inspired by the Scriptures, much like the preacher or true divine’s
sermon, or by God more directly, much like the Scripture writers themselves. In the penultimate
stanza of his poem, for instance, Marvell asks Milton two rhetorical questions that directly
concern the poem’s stylistic propriety and Milton’s seemingly prophetic ability to open the mind
of God to the minds of men:

    Where couldst thou words of such a compass find?

    Whence furnish such a vast expanse of mind?

    Just Heav’n thee like Tiresias to requite

    Rewards with Prophecy thy loss of sight. (lines 41-44)

The lines do not just reverse the conclusion reached by many of Milton’s contemporaries that
God punished Milton with blindness for his role in the regicide; they situate Milton in the epic
tradition—likening the blind poet to Homer—and elevate Milton to one of God’s worldly
messengers or ministers. Milton’s early training for the ministry surely acquainted him with the

124 Though Marvell does not suggest it in his prefatory poem “On Paradise Lost,” for Milton had not yet
published Paradise Regained, Milton’s patient suffering in political exile can be likened to Christ’s trials in
the desert—as preparations for the ministry of God’s Word. Just as Christ meets his Adversary in the
wilderness and defeats him by a stronger sense of logical and rhetorical propriety based solely in a right
reading of the Scriptures, Milton sees it a part of his political-poetical project to administer to the spiritual
condition of the nation by administering to the spiritual condition of his readers, “justify[ing] the ways of
God to men” in Paradise Lost and modeling heroic patience and obedience through the calling of the
perfect Christian orator in Paradise Regained. Milton reflects upon his own spiritual condition through his
physical condition in “When I Consider How My Light Is Spent,” for example: “though my soul more bent
/ To serve . . . my Maker, and present / My true account,” patience “to prevent . . . murmur, soon replies,
“God doth not need / Either man’s work or His own gifts. / Who best Bear His mild yoke, they serve Him
best” (lines 5-11). Like Christ, who “unobserv’d / Home to his Mother’s house private return’d” (4.638-39)
rhetoric of prophesy, which Perkins treats in his *Art of Prophesying* when he draws likenesses between ministers of the Word and God’s angels, trading on the Greek word ἄγγελος, meaning “messenger,” or which Augustine suggests to aspiring ministers in *On Christian Doctrine* when he encourages them to pray for understanding to rightly interpret the Scriptures and to pray for clarity and propriety in their presentation of the Scriptures’ arguments in their sermons. Marvell thus introduces the rhetoric of prophesy in his prefatory poem to soften the seeming impropriety of Milton’s audacious appeal to originality and inventiveness with his use of Scriptural arguments in the creation of his epic argument.

Like the Scriptures’ rhetoric and the preachers who deploy sermon rhetoric to open the Scriptures to their congregations, Milton’s poem “Draws the Devout” and “deter[s] the Profane.” His words, as Marvell admits, “At once delight and horror on us seize” (line 35). The substance of Milton’s epic argument—to “assert Eternal Providence, / And justify the ways of God to men”—is entirely contingent like the preacher’s argument on his ability to suit the Scriptures’ message to the spiritual conditions of his readers, so that Milton’s argument presumes to open Scripture to readers like the preacher’s argument opens Scripture to listeners. In this way, Milton’s understanding of the role his poetics plays in the process of opening Scripture entirely squares with Augustine’s understanding of the Scriptures’ perfect rhetorical propriety, which the preacher and presumably Milton, the poet, try to emulate. In *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine

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at the end of *Paradise Regained*, having defeated the Adversary and answered his calling to administer God’s Word, Milton’s political influence is no less powerful in his exile. He can still fulfill his religio-political calling even after his retirement from public life. Milton’s Christianization of classical virtues conflates the classical distinction between man’s active, political labors in service to the republic and the leisurely, recreational, or contemplative hours he spends writing poetry or philosophizing. He closes “When I Consider How My Light Is Spent” with this very conflation: “They also serve [God and nation] who only stand and wait” (line 14).

125 See Chapter 1 “Rhetorical Propriety in Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine*” and Chapter 3 “Proprietary-Thinking as Preparation for Inspiration” for a fuller treatment of Augustine’s and Perkins’ thoughts on role rhetorical propriety plays in the preaching arts. See also Jameela Lares’ *Milton and the Preaching Arts* for a fuller treatment of Milton’s early training for the ministry, the preaching manuals and rhetorical tactics with which he would have been acquainted, and how his education for the ministry influenced his poetics.
turns the problem of Scriptural obscurity and ambiguity on its head, claiming that the darker places of Scripture are indeed part of divine eloquence and the Scriptures’ rhetorical effect. Casual readers need the rigors of obscurity to train them to read the Scriptures’ message rightly and to discipline their apparent pride into humility. Obscure passages also exert more seasoned readers by rescuing them from tedium of simplicity. Augustine thus considers the usefulness of obscurity and ambiguity: “I have no doubt that that this is all divinely predetermined, so that pride may be subdued by hard work and intellects which tend to despise things that are easily discovered may be rescued from boredom and reinvigorated” (32). As Marvell observes, Milton’s words inspire in readers both a sense of delight and a sense of dread, which again squares Milton’s poetic purpose in *Paradise Lost* with the duties of the orator in classical rhetorical tradition, as well as with the duties of the preacher according to Augustine in *On Christian Doctrine* and those, such William Perkins, who are writing sermon manuals in Augustine’s wake. Augustine’s own view of good preaching bears all the hallmarks of his training in classical rhetoric, for he sees it the duties of the preacher to teach, delight, and move his hearers, which are, of course, Cicero’s three oratorical offices. Marvell remarks upon Milton’s success in realizing the latter two orator’s offices—delighting his readers and moving them to a sense of horror—and implies the first office—teaching the reader—for which he refers the reader to the argument and purpose with which Milton opens his epic: to “justify the ways of God to men.”

If Milton’s view of preaching does, as Marvell suggests in “On Paradise Lost,” square with Augustine’s view of the art in *On Christian Doctrine*, which in turn advances a view of oratory as Cicero had outlined it in *On Oratory and Orators*, then Milton’s view of the art’s purpose can also be said to square with Augustine’s Christianization of classical rhetoric and philosophy. The conflation can already be found in Cicero’s writings on rhetoric. In *On Oratory*, for instance, Cicero argues for the “pristine union” between wisdom and eloquence that ought to
have never been severed, tracing the distancing of wisdom from oratory to Plato’s writings on the art of dialectic. Cicero opens this section of his discourse *On Oratory* with a clear allusion to Socrates, who by his dialectical “science” was first to part wisdom from eloquence that he might question rhetoric’s status as an art:

But the streams of learning [writes Cicero] have flowed from the common summit of science, like rivers from the Apennines, in different directions, so that the philosophers have passed, as it were, into the Upper or Ionian sea, a Greek sea, abounding with harbours, but the orators have fallen into the Lower or Tuscan, a barbarian sea, infested with rocks and dangers, in which even Ulysses himself had mistaken his course. (351)

Cicero’s image (L. *Ex communi sapientium iugo*), which Watson renders in this passage as “[flowing] from the common summit of science,” compares Socrates to the heights of philosophy and his dialectical method to source of the streams of learning. That Cicero laments their separation into different directions, the philosophers finding a privileged and well-respected place in the Upper sea and the rhetoricians landing themselves in the barbarous and mistaken Lower sea, suggests that Cicero understood dialectic and rhetoric as “counterpart arts,” much like Aristotle before him. Cicero looks beyond Socrates to the Sophists who united wisdom and eloquence as the spring from which aspiring orators must drink, advising the aspiring orator who is “desirous to emulate Pericles, or Demosthenes, . . . and captivated with [Cicero’s] noble and illustrious idea and excellence of a perfect orator,” to drink deeply “all the powers of Carneades, or those of Aristotle” (352).

The oratorical displays of Carneades of Cyrene (214-129 BC), whom Cicero references in this passage, were notorious for their urbanity and wit. Though Carneades has come to be
associated with his role as head of the Academy in its skeptical phase, Cicero seems to have taken much from Carneades, particularly his belief in what M. D. Usher refers to in his essay “Carneades’ Quip: Orality, Philosophy, Wit, and the Poetics of Impromptu Quotation” as the “aesthetics of referentiality” (191). Carneades was widely lauded not merely for his ability to spontaneously quote lengthy passages of poetry in his oratorical demonstrations, but also for his ability to argue convincingly on both sides of an issue. Otherwise dismissed as merely “sophisticated” or “skeptical” philosophy with no real truth value, Usher observes that

It is now generally agreed among modern scholars of ancient philosophy that Carneades’ use of antilogy and argument throughout his career was no mere sophistical display of arguing both sides of an issue or of making the weaker argument the stronger, but was philosophically motivated: to persuade someone of the truth and simultaneous untruth of two opposing sides of an argument only served to underscore problems inherent in a person’s ability to accurately interpret “impressions,” or phantasiae, that present themselves to the senses and buttressed the Skeptics’ belief that, in view of those problems, human beings should suspend ultimate judgment on all matters of truth. Seen in this light, Carneades’ displays of verbal prowess are closer to Socratic interrogation (elenchus) than to epideictic oratory. His virtuosity, in other words, was aimed primarily at debunking unsupportable opinions and dispelling illusions. (192)

Usher’s pairing of Carneadean rhetoric with the “verbal give-and-take” (192) that characterizes Socrates’ dialectical method, which he used to interact with interlocutors in Plato’s dialogues, further elucidates Cicero’s advice to orators that, if they wish to emulate highly esteemed orators like Pericles and Demosthenes, they should consult philosophers who sought to unite wisdom and
eloquence, not divide them. What Carneades had unified in his “sophisticated” and “skeptical” practice of philosophy, Socrates sought to divide with his dialectical method and Aristotle later reunifies both in his Rhetoric, in which he positions dialectic and rhetoric as “counterpart arts,” and in his Nicomachean Ethics, in which he examines under the rubric of phronesis, translated as “prudence” or “practical wisdom,” the ethical practice of arguing in utremque partem or “disputing on either side of the case.” Cicero embraces this verbal give-and-take as an oratorical tactic grounded, much like Carneades had argued, in the ethical practice of suspending judgment on all matters of truth.

The only facet that seems to be missing from Cicero’s more holistic conception of rhetoric as the “pristine union” of wisdom and eloquence in the person of his “perfect orator” is the orator’s desire to evoke delight or an aesthetic response in his hearers. Cicero’s appeals to Carneades and Aristotle as sources of wisdom are more specifically based on the logical-ethical practice of arguing in utremque partem, but for all the seriousness, esteem, and respect that has been accorded the Socratic philosophical tradition, Socrates’ own verbal give-and-take in the practice of his dialectical method is not without a sense of playfulness and wit. As Usher

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126 See Victoria Kahn’s *Rhetoric, Prudence, and Skepticism in the Renaissance* for a discussion of arguing in utremque partem as evidence of the reemergence of academic skepticism in Renaissance Humanists’ reading and rhetorical practices, by which readers and rhetors would examine both sides of an issue and delay judgment so that they might interpret or judge the best course of speech and action. Kahn traces the practice through Cicero to Aristotle’s understanding of phronesis (φρόνησις) in his Ethics as “prudence,” “practical judgment” or “practical wisdom.” For Kahn, prudence is “ratiocination or reflection about the best course of action appropriate to the achievement of a particular end” (18). That ratiocination and reflection presuppose language as the medium through which the virtue of prudence is realized makes prudence both an ethical and a rhetorical concept for Aristotle. Kahn’s definition of prudence, as she understands it in Aristotle’s Ethics, overlaps nicely with Aristotle’s definition of the purpose and end of rhetoric in his Rhetoric, where he writes that rhetoric is “an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion” (1355a1). At the heart of these two definitional statements, of course, is the orator who is surveying his options before he selects a particular course of speaking. And his point of view is that these options are only at this point potential speech, and only potential speech inasmuch as the would-be speaker has wisdom and experience enough to choose the most appropriate discourse from the possibilities open to him. The decision assumes that the speaker can read accurately and respond appropriately to the rhetorical situation and its many contingencies.
observes, however, some modern commentators on philosophical tradition misunderstand the rhetorical effect verbal artistry has upon an audience of philosophical discourse and what verbal play is designed to achieve. Usher cites, for example, Erich Gruen, who argues in *The Hellenistic World and Coming of Rome* that Carneades’ “speeches were showpieces, a dazzling display of rhetorical virtuosity, seductive and disarming” (342). Usher shows that labeling a speech that exemplifies both wit and urbanity “sophistical” has consequences for Gruen’s “Coming Rome,” for the most proficient of Rome’s statesmen were educated in Athens, many of them under the tutelage of philosophers whose rhetoric has been called “sophistical” by their contemporaries. Usher cites Gruen as one commentator who follows too closely ancient sources that were hostile to the ethics and aesthetics of Academic skepticism. Usher argues instead for a return to the claim that philosophy originates in contests of wit and riddle-solving, which, for all the seriousness and certitude it has advanced in its syllogisms, categories, and abstractions, “has remained in practice very close to the world of orality” (193) and appeared as something more akin to the Greek games than to closeted speculation or “cloistered virtue.”  

To make his case, Usher returns to the position Johan Huizinga had advanced in his book *Homo Ludens* that  

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127 Milton chose the title *Areopagitica* as a direct allusion to a speech written by the Athenian orator, Isocrates, a speech which in turn refers to the Areopagus, the hill in Athens where the tribunals met in council. Isocrates had hoped to restore the power of these tribunals in order to restore civil liberty in Athens much like Milton encouraged his Parliamentarian to listen to “the voice of reason” and repeal the Licensing Order of 1643, which required authors to obtain a government-issued license to publish their work. Milton argued that such prohibitions hamstring Truth and prevent “her and Falsehood [from] grapple[ing],…in free and open encounter.” Milton also claims in the same polemical and agonistic style as the Greek orators that he “cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat” (728). As with other of his prose tracts in which he embraces the classical belief in educating the whole person, mind and body, Milton compares martial strength to mental strength in *Areopagitica*, arguing that free and civil discourse depends entirely on truth’s exercise in verbal contests, real or playful. See also Thomas Corns’ *Uncloistered Virtue: English Political Literature, 1640-1660*. Corns notes striking similarities between Socratic interrogation (*elenchus*) and Milton’s argumentative strategies in his prose polemics, particularly *Eikonoklastes*. 
We can say with certainty that the philosopher, from the earliest times to the late Sophists and Rhetors, always appeared as a typical champion. He challenged his rivals, he attacked them with vehement criticism and extolled his own opinions as the only true ones with all the boyish cocksureness of archaic man. In style and form . . . philosophy was polemical and agonistic. (115)

Huizinga’s tracing of philosophical speculation to its origins in the mental or verbal contest suggests that rhetorical virtuosity was never merely a mark of “sophisticated” philosophy or rhetorical sophistry, but rather a mark of all philosophy. Huizinga emphasizes pre-Socratic philosophy’s penchant for orality, particularly in the controversy, disputation, and debate and shows how the oratorical dimension survives in Plato’s “dialogues” and in Aristotle’s dialectical inquiry, even though, unlike their predecessors, they committed their ideas to writing.  

Cicero’s strong Greek education would have brought him into contact with the pre-Socratic and Socratic philosophers with whom he converses in On Oratory and Orators. For Cicero, the form and style of discourse is just as important as its message and logic and ought to be wed to one another whether one treats philosophical or rhetorical discourse. Moreover, Cicero observes much like the Sophists preceding him that the arts of philosophy and discourse cut across all knowledge domains, so they must be understood as the pre-Socratics had practiced them.

128 See Walter Ong’s Orality and Literacy for a discussion of how the development of writing technologies has shaped human discourse. Commentators have yet to examine the Ramist bent in Milton’s understanding of logic alongside Milton’s “residual orality” in the two epics he dictated to his amanuenses after the onset of his blindness. Ong traces in Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue the emergence of modern scientific discourse in Ramist dialectic’s visualization, spatialization, and quantification of thought. In Orality and Literacy and other of his writings, Ong traces vestiges of oral culture in written expression. Milton’s poetics is largely shaped by tensions between the visual or spatial arrangement indicative of Ramist dialectic, which serves as the basis for Milton’s logical understanding of rhetorical and poetical invention, and the residual oral-aural strategies oral cultures used to recall and preserve information in the absence of writing or, in Milton’s case, in the absence of sight.
For . . . the ancients, [writes Cicero,] till the time of Socrates, united all knowledge and science in all things, whether they appertained to morality, to the duties of life, to virtue, or to civil government, with the faculty of speaking; but afterwards, the eloquent being separated by Socrates from the learned, (as I have already explained,) and this distinction being continued by all the followers of Socrates, the philosophers disregarded eloquence, and the orators philosophy; nor did they at all encroach upon each other’s provinces, except that the orators borrowed from the philosophers, and the philosophers from the orators, such things as they would have taken from the common stock if they had been inclined to remain in their pristine union. But . . . Socrates excluded the pleaders of causes from their own body, and from the common title of philosophers, though the ancients were of the opinion that there was a miraculous harmony between speaking and understanding. (352)

The “miraculous harmony” Cicero claims the ancients held between speaking and understanding is religious in its mystery, which would not have been lost upon the church fathers following Cicero, who were educated in classical, Ciceronian eloquence and nominally rejected it to evidence their conversion to Christianity. Among them was Augustine, whose Ciceronian bent is everywhere apparent in his writings and made it a central concern of his vocation to Christianize Cicero’s return to the ancient, mystical harmony between wisdom and eloquence. Augustine preserved Cicero’s argument, but shifted the sense of rhetorical propriety that was its source; he turned from the ancient Greeks—the pre-Socratics whom Cicero cited in *On Oratory and Orators*—toward the ancient Hebrews, whose penchant for orality matched and, some argue, influenced the Greeks’ own, and toward the early Christian church, beginning with the apostles who committed Christ’s oral ministry to writing.
Augustine’s approach to faith as a form of reason can be gleaned from a Scriptural passage he often cites in the *Confessions*: “Behold, piety is wisdom” (Job 28:28). It is one of the hallmarks of the Bible’s perfect eloquence that it presents itself to the beginning reader as a lowly text with seemingly conflicting teachings, much like it had to Augustine himself before his conversion; yet as the reader matures in the faith, the Scriptures’ message becomes more profound and presents to the exegete “mountainous difficulty” “enveloped in mysteries” (40). The Bible’s meaning, clarity, and wisdom, in other words, grow in proportion to the reader’s faith. Augustine’s view of the Scriptures’ “perfect” rhetoric, which meets the spiritual conditions of each of its hearers or readers, is motivated by Cicero’s notion of the “perfect” orator, which Augustine idealizes in God’s Holy Spirit as the Scriptures’ inspiration and Christ’s ministry as the Word’s incarnation. For Augustine, wisdom and eloquence meet in the written Word and its Christian ministry, and his matching of wisdom to eloquence and eloquence to the persons who present and hear it presented confirm Augustine’s interest in stylistic and rhetorical propriety. It is difficult to determine whether Milton reached the same conclusion as Augustine about the Scriptures’ perfect eloquence and Christ’s place as perfect orator and minister of God’s Word by reading Augustine himself and noting his Ciceronian influence or by reading the Scriptures’ rhetoric himself through a Ciceronian lens. That Milton read Augustine is clear from references to Augustine’s thought in several of Milton’s prose tracts and agreement on numerous theological points between Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine* and *City of God* and Milton’s *On Christian Doctrine*.  

129 Peter Fiore argues in *Milton and Augustine: Patterns of Augustinian Thought in Milton’s Paradise Lost* that it is one of the most salient points of overlap between Milton’s and Augustine’s respective theologies that human beings have been blessed with the divine light of reason, which enables them to make free choices for good or for ill. Augustine’s teachings on free will would have departed slightly from Milton’s, however, particularly over the doctrine of God’s grace. Fiore cites Milton’s *On Christian Doctrine* to draw connections between Milton and Augustine’s understandings of the role reason plays in humans’ free will. Fiore claims that Milton believed that “everyone is provided with a sufficient degree of innate reason for
Augustine’s Ciceronian influence in his reading of the Scriptures’ rhetoric reflects Milton’s purpose for avoiding rhyme in his epics, for Augustine and Milton both baptize pagan cultural materials for Christian ends. Whereas Augustine developed a “Christian rhetoric” and a Christianized sense of rhetorical propriety from a Ciceronian model, Milton developed his sense of stylistic propriety by turning at once to epic tradition, crafting his conception of “English Heroic Verse without Rime” to bring his own epics into accord with Homer’s style in Greek and Virgil’s style in Latin, “Rime being no necessary Adjunct or true Ornament of a Poem” (210). Milton only later added his argument on “why the Poem Rimes not” (210) to satisfy the inquiries of many readers who desired to see its appearance in Paradise Lost. Milton educates such “vulgar Readers” in his argument on the poem’s verse, claiming that “the jingling sound of like endings [was] a fault avoided by the learned Ancients both in Poetry and all good Oratory” (210). However, Milton’s sense of stylistic propriety derives only in part from Greek and Roman poetics and oratorical principles. Milton looks also to Hebrew verse as it appears in the Scriptures, such as the Psalms and the Book of Job, which, like their Greek and Roman counterparts, are at “liberty . . . from the troublesome and modern bondage of Riming” (210). The importance of the poem’s thematic and stylistic inventiveness also moves Marvell to close his prefatory poem “On Paradise Lost” at once calling attention to his own bondage to rhyme even as he praises Milton’s challenge to the custom or fashion of the day. Marvell’s comments on the verse’s stylistic propriety match Milton’s own comments in his prefatory note. Marvell admires Milton’s stylistic confidence, saying that Milton “Well mightst…scorn thy Readers to allure / With tinkling Rime, him to be able to resist evil desires by his own effort” (56). Although Augustine and Milton agree that the appropriate practice of humans’ right reason is directly contingent upon their practice of piety and the degree of their faith in God’s goodness, Milton departs from Augustine in one crucial respect. Augustine debated Pelagius in the fifth century largely over the issue of how much human beings can be said to exercise the reasoning capacity itself without the direct guidance of God’s grace.
of thy own sense secure” (lines 45-46), arguing that poets merely adorn their verse with rhyme “for fashion” (line 50), and finally admitting that

I too transported by the Mode offend,

And while I meant to Praise thee must Commend.

Thy Verse created like thy Theme sublime,

In Number, Weight, and Measure, needs not Rime. (lines 51-54)

Consistent with his questioning of the propriety of Milton’s bold thematic choices earlier in “On Paradise Lost,” which Marvell later elevates to heroism and piety, Marvell at first questions Milton’s disparaging of rhyme as a “vulgar” stylistic convention little befitting his epic subject, which leads Marvell to ironically admit that he too is so transported by the convention that he has chosen to dress his praise of Milton’s stylistic boldness in the same convention Milton disparages. Marvell’s irony aside, he praises Milton’s sense of stylistic propriety in matching style to subject and theme—the style of Paradise Lost being “In Number, Weight, and Measure” perfectly fitted to the sublimity of its theme. Marvell’s final line echoes Milton’s own assessment of “Heroic Verse,” which “to all judicious ears . . . consists only in apt Numbers, fit quantity of Syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one Verse into another” (210). The thematic tendency of Marvell’s poem is that Milton’s thematic and stylistic liberties are “heroic” in the sense that Milton sets out alone against convention, refashioning the merely fashionable. This first sense of propriety, by which Milton’s literary indecorum reshapes modern literary decorum, also suggests a second—that Milton sings of heroic subjects until then unsung in “heroic verse,” in a style perfectly suited to its subject.
Augustine’s Christianization of pagan rhetorical principles reshaped these principles’ intent while preserving their efficacy. Augustine had discovered the in the Scriptures a peculiar kind of stylistic plainness he did not see replicated anywhere in Ciceronian rhetoric. Augustine noted, however, that the Scriptures’ rhetoric of plainness emphasized the first of Cicero’s oratorical offices—to teach—and so their style was rhetorically effective in a Ciceronian sense. The Scriptures’ style, much like the sermon rhetoric Augustine had advanced in On Christian Doctrine, was designed to deliver God’s designs to man. Milton’s Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained follows Augustine in both style and intent. Milton’s style achieves a conflation of Greco-Roman poetical principles and the poetics of the Hebrew Scriptures, and like Augustine’s sermon rhetoric, Milton intends to open the Scriptures and “justify” God’s designs. Just as Augustine had overcome the peculiar plainness of the Scriptures’ rhetoric to see Cicero’s oratorical offices at work, even if he did not see Cicero’s sophistic emphasis on delighting the audience with oratorical display, so too did Milton turn the virtues of Greco-Roman heroism on its head to develop his argument about “patience” and “obedience” being the hallmarks of Christian virtue. And yet, Milton still imagined like his pagan forbears that virtues “untried” are no virtues at all—that it is in one’s exercise of patience and obedience that they become virtuous and part of a person’s moral character. Augustine’s On Christian Doctrine presents the Ciceronian reunion of wisdom and eloquence in the person of the Christian orator, and Milton’s Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained dramatize the failure and recovery of this “pristine union.” What Adam loses by his impatience and disobedience, Christ recovers by modeling these same virtues. Typologically, Adam is, in other words, a “type” of Christ. Both men have the same adversary, but only Christ understands that the exercise of these virtues is contingent upon kairotic propriety, for the exercise of patience and obedience presuppose waiting for the proper occasion and place to speak and act. Just as Augustine’s emphasis on the Scriptures’ teaching
through plain style in part turns Ciceronian rhetorical ornament on its head, though Cicero also allows for discursive plainness where appropriate, so too does Milton’s emphasis on waiting in part turn the pagan heroism, which most often results from military might or oratorical contest, on its head, though “courage” is merely one of the four classical or “cardinal” virtues that lead men to live good lives, the remaining three suggesting both patience and obedience in their practice: temperance, prudence, and justice.

In *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, Milton dramatizes *kairotic* propriety as the substance of prudence—or practical wisdom—which, beginning with Aristotle’s reunion of dialectic and rhetoric (of wisdom and eloquence) as “counterpart arts,” had become the one virtue necessary for the achievement of all the rest. Milton embraced Aristotle’s classical pairing of wisdom and eloquence in the ethical concept of *phronesis* or prudence, so that Milton understood “timeliness” or, more specifically, seeing and seizing the proper time to speak or act as the soul of wisdom and having ready the right thing to say as the soul of eloquence. Given the degree of skill and spontaneity required to see and seize the right moment and to say the right thing, Milton’s dramatization of *kairotic* propriety in his epics suggests that he was not only familiar with the classical debates over the orator’s education, but also considered it the purpose of education to prepare the student to respond properly to any occasion by teaching him to pair practical wisdom and eloquence. Cicero and Quintilian had both argued that one cannot learn eloquence by studying rhetorical precepts alone, but rather had to possess some measure of natural ability that he may refine his own natural gifts by imitating equally gifted, but more experienced speakers. Quintilian added in his conception of the “ideal orator”—the good man speaking well—that eloquent men must first have a clear idea of what is good and true. Augustine inherited Cicero’s perfect orator and Quintilian’s ideal orator, and, like them, argued that timely and appropriate responses to a speaking situation depend upon the speaker’s *ad hoc* reading and response to the
occasion, audience, and circumstances of his speech. Reading and responding to these contingencies with spontaneity and propriety entails both natural ability and education—that the speaker has some preexisting notion of what is good to say and perhaps has some experience saying the right thing on other, similar occasions.

That Milton understood the unity of wisdom with eloquence as not just the substance of the orator’s education, but of any education whatever is plainly apparent in his treatise *Of Education*, where he argues that “Logic . . . so much as is useful, is to be referred to this due place with all her well-couched heads and topics, until it be time to open her contracted palm into a graceful and ornate rhetoric . . . [t]o which poetry would be made subsequent” (636-37). Only after years of study, concludes Milton, will these students be furnished with “that act of reason which in ethics is called Proairesis; that they may with some judgment contemplate upon moral good and evil” (635). Milton is less concerned in *Of Education* with the students’ natural ability than with the program of study that best cultivates it. The curriculum he has in mind prepares the student ultimately for the exercise of moral and ethical judgment—for intelligent choice or practical wisdom—through his study and practice of logical, rhetorical, and poetical precepts. Milton names in this treatise a number of philosophers, rhetoricians, and poetics worthy of imitation, but more significantly, his course of study begins with mastering the “contracted palm” of logic and, after years of study, slowly progresses to the arts of presentation, the “open hand” of rhetoric and poetry.\(^\text{130}\) Only after many years of study do the students cultivate their natural

\(^{130}\) Ronald W. Cooley argues in “Reformed Eloquence: Inability, Questioning, and Correction in *Paradise Lost*” that in *Paradise Lost*, Milton sets out to define a “reformed eloquence,” which Cooley traces to his pamphlet *Of Education*, in which Milton “presents learning as a corrective, restorative process, an attempt ‘to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright’” (232). Cooley observes that one peculiar feature of Milton’s educational reform, by which Milton means that both the curriculum and the student need reformed, is the students’ relatively late training in rhetoric and poetry, at least by Renaissance standards. For Milton, argues Cooley, eloquence is “the crowning achievement of the students’ education], the skill that allows a man to put his learning to work in the service of ‘true vertue’” (232); furthermore, says Cooley, Milton illustrates in *Paradise Lost*, specifically in Satan’s rhetorical “virtuosity,” the moral
ability enough to make intelligent moral and ethical choices. Milton rails against the existing educational practice of testing students before they are adequately prepared. Though he focuses specifically on students’ learning of the language arts, Milton argues that it is a preposterous exaction, forcing the empty wits of children to compose themes, verses and orations, which are acts of the ripest judgment and the final work of a head filled by long reading and observing with elegant maxims and copious invention . . . Whereas, if after some preparatory grounds of speech by their certain forms got into memory, they were led to the praxis thereof in some chosen short book lessoned thoroughly to them, they might then forthwith proceed to learn the substance of good things, and arts in due order . . . (631-32)

Milton argues for the students’ learning the language arts at the proper time in their education so that they might first “learn the substance of good things” and “ripen” their “judgment” before responding to specific rhetorical or poetical occasions. Aristotle’s moral and ethical concepts of proairesis and phronesis are, for Milton, directly contingent upon the students’ internalization of kairotic propriety: A timely (long and properly sequenced) course of study enables students to rightly read and respond to their rhetorical situation, to invent the most rhetorically, ethically, and morally effective discourse fitted to the occasion.

Milton’s appeals in Of Education to rendering students both patient and pliable—“draw[ing] them in willing obedience” (633)—not only makes a virtue of patience and obedience, but also makes it, like Aristotle’s notion of practical wisdom, the virtue necessary for the achievement of all the rest. In Paradise Lost, Milton invents upon the story of Adam and Eve’s and ethical consequences of deploying eloquence devoid of true insight. Satan’s rhetoric “masks his specious arguments, at least from the demonic audience,” so that “[p]art of the thrust of Paradise Lost,” Cooley concludes, is “to provide models of a reformed eloquence, including forms of ornament that express, rather than obscure, the moral content of the speech, and the condition of the speaker” (233).
temptation as an example of “patience and obedience tried,” and perhaps “tried” before both characters’ moral judgment was sufficiently ripe. If Milton’s repetition of “right reason” is any indication of its importance to the drama of *Paradise Lost*, then waiting to speak or act becomes the substance of right reason’s proper exercise.\(^{131}\) Aristotle argued that it was a condition of ethics to suspend judgment until fully informed of a case, and Renaissance Humanists embraced Cicero’s ethical practice of arguing *in utremque partem* or “on both sides of the case” before rendering judgment in favor of one side or the other. Milton consolidates his moral understanding of right reason in *On Christian Doctrine*, where he argues that prior to Christ’s ministry, none could be thought to have been well-disposed or worthy of heaven without the gift of right reason.

Milton writes that

> there are some remnants of the divine image left in man [after the fall], the union of which in one individual renders him more fit and disposed for the kingdom of God than another. Since therefore we are not merely senseless stocks, some cause at least must be discovered in the nature of man himself, why divine grace is rejected by some and embraced by others. (923)

Milton himself argues on both sides of the case in this passage, only drawing the most tentative conclusions about the justice of God’s dispensation of grace prior to Christ’s ministry. Milton

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131 See Richard Arnold’s *Logic of the Fall: Right Reason and [Im]Pure Reason in Milton’s Paradise Lost* for a complete treatment of Milton’s understanding of right reason or what Milton at various places in the epic refers to as “prime wisdom,” “better knowledge,” or “umpire conscience.” “This form of reasoning,” Arnold observes in his introduction, simultaneously unites the intellectual or ratiocinative faculty and the moral or spiritual sense; it is animated and sustained by (and operates according to) one’s higher conscience, moral sense, or, in theological terms—and certainly in the case of *Paradise Lost*—the holy spirit or religious conscience. This form of reasoning is directed toward and exists precisely to dispose one toward appropriate action, unassailable belief, and edifying behavior: it is the highest faculty in the human being, certainly higher than the more limited pure reason. (x)

As Arnold states in this passage, Milton’s concept of “right reason” serves as the logical basis of all “appropriate action.” Arnold’s suggestion is that logical propriety motivates rhetorical propriety.
finally concludes that “the gift of reason has been implanted in all, by which they may of themselves resist bad desires, so that no one can complain of, or allege in excuse, the depravity of his own nature compared with that of others” (923). Milton argues that God had created all “fit and disposed” for the kingdom of heaven, for He “implanted in all” “the gift of [right] reason…by which they may of themselves resist bad desires.” Though Milton here refers to history before the gospel, he draws on Christ’s parable of the sower related in “Matt. xiii. where [Milton explains] the nature of the soil is variously described in three or four ways, part as stony ground, part overrun with thorns, part good ground, at least in comparison of the others, before it had as yet received any seed” (923). It is only fitting that Milton turn to the parable of the sower and use an agricultural metaphor to show that, before Christ’s ministry, man was already implanted with the right reason needed to weigh moral and ethical choices, for man’s loss and Christ’s regaining of the garden—of paradise—is contingent upon humanity’s exercise of right reasoning. It is by man’s reason, then, that Milton intends to “justify the ways of God to men.”

Milton places the doctrine of right reason at the heart of *Paradise Lost*, repeating it in three of the epic’s most important dialogues. Crucial to this doctrine, as Milton later argues in *On Christian Doctrine*, is the propriety of humanity’s exercise of moral and ethical judgment. To judge rightly, humanity must first obey God, so that faith becomes a necessary precondition for the exercise of right reason. Without faith in God, humanity’s reasoning capacity becomes degraded and its exercise corrupt. Milton dramatizes in *Paradise Lost* what is so peculiar about the exercise of right reason—that it is contingent upon prophesy. For Milton, rhetorical propriety requires humanity’s patient and obedient adherence to God’s Word; it requires that man wait for revelation and fulfillment, and endure despite his ignorance and desire to speak and act before the proper moment. Milton first addresses the doctrine of right reason through the rhetoric of prophesy in Book III of *Paradise Lost*, which opens with God the Father discussing with His Son
Satan’s flight toward the newly-created paradise. The Father foretells of humanity’s fall, but accepts no blame for it:

For Man will hark’n to [Satan’s] glozing lies,

And easily transgress the sole Command,

Sole pledge of his obedience: So will fall

Hee and his faithless Progeny: whose fault?

Whose but his own? (3.93-97)

The Father understands in a single moment that Adam will fall. It is as certain as His divine decree that Adam will “transgress the sole Command, / Sole pledge of his obedience.” God cannot be held in any way culpable for man’s choice, as the Father later contends: “they themselves decreed / Thir own revolt, not I: if I foreknew / Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault / Which had no less prov’d certain unforeknown” (3.116-19). Milton also argues in his chapter on “Predestination” in *On Christian Doctrine* that “the prescience of God seems to have no connection with the principle or essence of predestination” (922). God influences neither belief nor doubt in man, though he foreknows both. It is God’s desire, writes Milton in his chapter on “Predestination,” that all his rational creatures attain salvation, for he hates none of them.

The logic of Milton’s “justification” of God’s ways, which releases God from any culpability in man’s fall, is dizzyingly paradoxical when considered through Milton’s doctrine of right reason. God created man with the gift of reason that he might make good and proper moral and ethical judgments. Reason suggests freedom of choice and, therefore, free will; however, *right* reason results from man’s obedience to God’s Word and “sole Command,” his patient
endurance not transgress the realm of his ignorance until the proper time, a time known only to God, though revealed to man in prophesy. Man’s desire is to know, but it is his place to wait for the fulfillment of God’s prophesy and promise. As Milton contends concerning the doctrine of right reason in *On Christian Doctrine*, even before the revelation of the gospel in and through Christ, man’s salvation had been directly contingent upon his capacity for right reason. The rhetoric of prophesy requires faith, obedience, and patience—that man stand and wait—until what is prophesied is fulfilled. The paradox of Christian heroism, even before the time of Christ, is that man must view God the Father as the sole Author of appropriate speech and action, even as man appears the author of particular speech acts and deeds. Their “rightness” returns man’s words and actions to the Word of God, man’s capacity for reason being solely predicated upon his faith and obedience in the logic of the Logos, a logic which is not his own. Man’s spiritual salvation is thus predicated on his deferral of authority—of thought, word, and deed—to revelation given him by the Word of God. As Milton reflects upon his own physical and spiritual condition in the final line of “When I Consider How My Light Is Spent,” “They also serve who only stand and wait” (line 14). It is the paradoxical condition of the Christian hero to serve God, not himself, and to serve by standing and waiting for the second coming of Christ in fulfillment of Scriptural prophesy.

Milton’s justification of God in Book III of *Paradise Lost* shows that God’s perfect and eternal decree holds all subject to it, including Himself, even though the perfect decree requires no justification. That the decree is *eternal* is significant, for God sees all time in eternity, and so speaks and acts outside of time. God foreknows the appropriate time and place to speak and act, so that His speech and action are thus always-already suffused with a sense of kairotic propriety. Milton ties “proper timing” to economic propriety, for God reveals the substance of humanity’s fall in their desire to be “Authors to themselves in all / Both what they judge and what they
choose” (3.122-23). Milton’s notion of “Authorship” suggests economic propriety in the sense that man’s speech and actions originate in his will, his desire to act; and so he must “own” them as such. Such speech and actions realize the will of man, not the will of God, which evidences a mind corrupted by sin. Right reasoning positions God as the Author of all creation, including man’s good speech and actions, for what is good in man is God’s creation, as result of the Divine Will. The exercise of right reason necessitates humans’ freedom to speak and act of their own accord, but to speak and act properly and realize the Will or Decree of their Creator.

As God the Father admits to His Son,

Not free, what proof could they have giv’n sincere

Of true allegiance, constant Faith or Love,

Where only what they needs must do, appear’d,

Not what they would? what praise could they receive?

What pleasure I from such obedience paid,

When Will and Reason (Reason also is choice)

Useless and vain, of freedom both despoil’d,

Made passive both, had served necessity,

Not me. (3.103-11)

In accord with the Greeks’ understanding of speech and action as an index of character and the mental life of man, whereby thought and speech can be considered coterminous with actions, God here claims that “true allegiance” must result from man’s free judgment and choice. Otherwise,
both are made “passive,” a result of necessity, not choice. At the heart of this doctrine is the exercise of propriety. God the Father binds himself to his own divine decree, just as he binds all his rational creatures to the same decree; he is the perfect orator whose speech translates thought into action (or rather inaction), inasmuch as His speech act requires “obedience paid” in the form of man’s faith, love and praise of God that man himself might receive praise in turn.

Economic propriety therefore underwrites God’s rhetoric of propriety: God’s divine decree requires that man view God as Author of all creation, but man must exercise his gifts of right judgment and freely choose to do so. In this way, God’s decree prescribes limits for His relationship with man and man’s relationship with God, and the nature of this relationship, by a relational logic, informs both God’s nature and man’s nature—social propriety being God and man’s promise to think, speak, and act (to live and work) within these prescribed limits. Otherwise, both natures must die, having been changed to something else, as God concludes His first speech to His Son:

I form’d them free, and free they must remain,

Till they en thrall themselves: I else must change

Thir nature, and revoke the high Decree

Unchangeable, Eternal, which ordain’d

Thir freedom: they themselves ordain’d thir fall. (3.124-28)

That God’s nature is bound up in His “high Decree / Unchangeable, Eternal” Milton insists not only in Book III of Paradise Lost, but also in Chapter III of Book I in On Christian Doctrine, titled “Of God,” where he writes that
God is not mutable, so long as he decrees nothing absolutely which could happen otherwise through the liberty that he assigns to man. He would indeed be mutable if he were to obstruct by another decree that liberty which he had already decreed, or were to darken it with the least shadow of necessity. (913)

Milton shows that man’s sense of religious propriety is really a function of his sense of social propriety, his observance of the divine decree that articulated the terms of his relationship to God. Milton understands man’s trespass beyond the limits of his part in this social contract not merely as a breach of social propriety, but also a challenge to God’s economic propriety. Man’s action before the fall challenged the decree—God’s rhetoric of propriety—and, inasmuch as God’s rhetorical propriety is underwritten by economic propriety, Milton has God the Father lay out both the conditions and consequences of man’s challenge:

Man disobeying,

Disloyal breaks his fealty, and sins

Against the high Supremacy of Heav’n,

Affecting God-head, and so losing all,

To expiate his Treason hath naught left,

But to destruction sacred and devote,

He with his whole posterity must die,

Die hee or Justice must; unless for him

Some other able, and as willing, pay
The rigid satisfaction, death for death. (3.203-12)

God the Father appeals one last time to the rhetorical propriety of his divine decree, to which God has bound Himself and His creation. When man trespasses against this decree, he not only challenges God’s rhetorical and economic propriety, but also God’s nature; and in challenging God’s nature, man forfeits his own. Contingent upon this decree is humanity’s free will and right reason—the gifts of rational life that man was given as part of his social contract with God that man might rightly exercise social propriety and obey the decree (the rhetorical propriety) that gave man life and the economic propriety that underwrites his relationship to God and preserves man’s rational life. Man’s disobeying of God’s decree, to which both man and God were bound, thus undoes the relationship and ends in the death of either man’s nature or God’s. As God the Father observes, “Die hee or Justice must.”

The spiritual condition into which man falls by his transgression Milton views as an impropriety in several senses: First, Milton sees economic impropriety in man’s loss of his former glory. Only by God’s mercy—another aspect of his nature—will God “once more…renew / [Man’s] lapsed powers, though forfeit and enthrall’d / By sin to foul exorbitant desires” (3.175-77). Man squandered his gifts when he disobeyed God, and so these gifts are now diminished. His free will is “enthrall’d” by “foul exorbitant desires,” and it is these desires that move his will, not his capacity for right judgment. Milton refers to the second of these gifts—right judgment—as the “light” of reason, which, because it is God’s greatest gift in making man in His image, God Himself is “light” or “right reason” or “right judgment.” Milton advances the idea both in the beginning of Book III of Paradise Lost and in his chapter on “The Last Judgment” in On Christian Doctrine that “God is light” (PL 3.3). After man’s fall, from which the light of his reason and judgment is diminished, God’s mercy makes it so that, as God the Father says,
I will place within them as a guide

My Umpire Conscience, whom if they will hear,

Light after light well us’ they shall attain,

And to the end persisting, safe arrive. (3.194-97)

Milton emphasizes the exercise of right reason as the means of repairing its loss so that, at the end, man may return to the light or God-head. Milton thus likens man’s loss of light, reason, and judgment as the loss of God, an idea he further expounds in On Christian Doctrine, where he writes that in the Last Judgment, man will be judged according to “the measure of light which he has enjoyed.” In other words, man will be judged by his capacity to judge, the degree to which he exercises his right reason or conscience being the arbiter of whether he repairs its loss in the fall and ascends to heaven to procure his salvation. The origin and end of all good judgment is the light of God-head, which man realizes by observing economic propriety and using his gift. The

132 Milton writes Of Education in answer to Samuel Hartlib’s request that Milton develop in writing what he understands as the ideal of education. Milton praises Hartlib’s endeavor to reform education, as well as his discerning ability and good judgment, which Milton sees as a gift given Hartlib “either by the definite will of God so ruling, or the peculiar sway of nature, which also is God’s working” (630). Milton defines the “rule” of nature in On Christian Doctrine as that “mysterious power and efficacy of divine voice which went forth at the beginning, and to which, as to a perpetual command, all things have since paid obedience” (989). It is proper to human nature, concludes Milton, to observe God’s divine decree, as it is articulated in the Scriptures (for in the beginning was the Word), and to pay obedience to this decree. Milton suggests later in his address to Hartlib that the “peculiar sway of nature” that Hartlib obeys in reforming education is the exercise of good conscience and right judgment, which Milton himself recognizes as the exigency of his own treatise, as something he “can[not] in [good] conscience defer beyond this time both of so much need at once, and so much opportunity to try what God hath determined” (630). As is the case in other of his writings, Milton here appeals to kairotic propriety—seizing the proper rhetorical occasion—as an expression of conscience or right judgment. Milton contends that it is the very purpose of his treatise to reform human learning so that it may “repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, imitate him, to be like him, as we may the nearest by possessing our souls of true virtue, which being united to the heavenly grace of faith makes up the highest perfection” (631). I discuss in Chapter 5, Part 1 “The ‘Contracted Palm’ to the ‘Open Hand’” the curriculum Milton recommends for man’s attainment of moral and spiritual perfection, which begins with a clear sense of logical propriety as the substance of rhetorical and poetical appropriateness. “[T]o know God aright,” therefore, requires man to know as God knows, to be repossessed of the light of reason and moral and ethical discernment (i.e. good conscience) of which he had been dispossessed in some measure after his fall.
alternative is one of two kinds of spiritual darkness: man’s death or “the shadow of necessity,” which Milton understands in *On Christian Doctrine* and *Paradise Lost*, respectively, as the death of God’s justice and divine judgment (913; 3.110).

Second, Milton views man’s transgression as a social impropriety, for in doubting whether he was given sufficient light—knowledge, reason, discernment—to have stood on his own, man forfeited these gifts and ruined his relationship with God. That he would be led astray by a corrupt form of reasoning and rhetoric will be discussed at greater length below. In Book III of *Paradise Lost*, Milton merely anticipates man’s fall by having God the Father and His Son discourse outside of time on the doctrine of right reason. Milton also anticipates in the Father and Son’s eternal discourse the Son’s incarnation in Christ, dramatizing the moment when the Father puts the question to all of heaven how man’s spiritual life and God’s supreme justice might both be preserved:

> Die hee or Justice must; unless for him

> Some other able, and as willing, pay

> The rigid satisfaction, death for death.

> Say Heav’nly Powers, where shall we find such love,

> Which of ye will be mortal to redeem

> Man’s mortal crime, and just th’ unjust to save,

> Dwells in all Heaven charity so dear? (3.210-16)

In Milton’s dramatization of this moment, the seeming rhetorical question with which Milton closes God’s speech actually becomes a rhetorical moment in which God and reader anticipate an
Milton sees the sublimity of this moment in the awesome silence that God’s question at first inspires: “He ask’d,” writes Milton, “but all the Heav’ny Choir stood mute, / And silence was in Heav’n” (3.217-18). Milton’s reference to the silence of the “Heav’ny Choir,” whose constant singing praises to God eternally fills heaven, suggests a logical impropriety—that heaven might descend and die so that man might ascend and live; however, the Son’s answer shows that this is the only means of simultaneously preserving man’s life and the perfect justice of God’s divine decree. The Son intercedes on behalf of man, basing his argument in the propriety of the incarnation and sacrifice as the only “meet” payment redeem man’s spiritual debt:

Atonement for himself or offering meet,

Indebted and undone, hath none to bring:

Behold me then, mee for him, life for life

I offer, on mee let thine anger fall;

Account mee man. (3.234-38)

Stylistic and economic propriety meet in the Son’s diction. Since man cannot find a “meet offering” in atonement for his sin, the Son will become the “meet/meat offering” that will pay man’s debt and meet his due. In the Son’s diction, Milton couples economic metaphors—“indebted,” “account”—with the language of religious sacrifice—“atonement,” “offering”—to create a spiritual economy in which the Son at once fulfills the terms of God’s decree and, in becoming mortal that man might live, saves man’s spiritual life. Milton realizes the full kairotic propriety of this rhetorical moment when the Son’s “meet/meat” words anticipate the fulfillment of the Word, which, from the beginning, prophesied the fall of man and man’s redemption in the
calling and ministry of Christ. It is in the rhetoric of this moment of *Paradise Lost*, in other words, that Milton anticipates his perfect or complete Christian orator in the person of Jesus in *Paradise Regained*. In Books V and IX of *Paradise Lost*, Milton again dramatizes the doctrine of right reason and the logical and rhetorical improprieties that lead to man’s fall from grace. In *Paradise Regained*, Milton returns to the doctrine of right reason, dramatizing in Jesus’s calling and temptation the logical and rhetorical propriety necessary to “know God aright” and “repair the ruins of our first parents.”

God the Father’s explanation of the doctrine of right reason to His Son in Book III of *Paradise Lost* anticipates Raphael’s explanation of the same doctrine to Adam in Book V. Raphael begins his discussion of this doctrine by first explaining to Adam the great chain of being wherein all matter begins in and descends from God by various degrees to the different forms of life that comprise creation. Opening this discourse is Adam’s concern that the “earthly fruits” he serves Raphael does not suit an angel’s taste. Adam asks Raphael an apparently rhetorical question, “yet what compare?” earthly and heavenly food, for which Raphael offers a comparison that suits Adam’s understanding:

> O Adam, one Almighty is, from whom
>
> All things proceed, and up to him return,
>
> If not deprav’d from good, created all
>
> Such to perfection, one first matter all,

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133 I refer to Milton’s Jesus in *Paradise Regained* as a “perfect” or “complete” orator to show that, like Augustine, Milton bases his understanding of the Christian orator on a Ciceronian model and to suggest that Milton also understood Christ’s ministry as the perfect or complete reunion of humanity with the Godhead, as he argues in *Of Education* and *On Christian Doctrine*. 
Indu’d with various forms, various degrees
Of substance, and in things that live, of life;
But more refin’d, more spiritous, and pure,
As nearer him plac’t or nearer tending
Each in thir several active Spheres assign’d,
Till body up to spirit work, in bounds
Proportioned to each kind. (5.469-79)

Raphael explains to Adam the proper place according all life on the great chain of being given the degree of spirit with which God has endued it. Raphael teaches Adam that it is the relative proximity of created beings to God that renders their substance “more refin’d, more spiritous, and pure.” Milton’s theology in this passage suggests Augustine’s early aesthetic theory, which Augustine later developed in his understanding of Christian ethics and morality. Augustine offered his early aesthetic theory in *On the Beautiful and the Fitting*, a treatise he wrote well before his conversion when his “mind [still] moved within the confines of corporeal forms.” In this treatise, Augustine “proposed a definition and a distinction between the beautiful as that which is pleasing in itself, and the fitting as that which pleases because it fits well into something else” (*Confessions* 67). Augustine based his early aesthetic theory on the symmetry and unity he noted in natural forms, such as the human body, which can be said to be “beautiful” inasmuch as its members are symmetrical and appear to “fit” the whole. After his conversion, Augustine developed his aesthetic theory of the beautiful and the fitting into a moral understanding of symmetry and unity as not merely the *substance* of aesthetics, but also the *spirit* of morality.
Augustine’s early aesthetic theory thus takes on ethical and moral significance in his later writings: “since in virtue I loved peace and in vice I hated discord,” writes Augustine in his *Confessions*, “I noted that in virtue there is unity, in vice a kind of division. In the unity I thought I saw the rational mind and nature of truth and of the highest good; whereas in division there was some substance of irrational life and the nature of supreme evil” (67).

The proportional logic that informs Augustine’s early aesthetic theory squares with the proportional logic that Raphael offers Adam to explain the great chain of being. All of creation is created good, but it is each created thing’s relative proximity to God that renders it not only “more refin’d, more spiritous, and pure;” but also more complete and closer to the perfection that is God. Unity with God is the end toward which the spirit of every created thing tends, and every created thing develops beyond the “active Sphere,” which are the spiritual “bounds” each thing has been “assign’d.” Raphael explains to Adam the proportional logic with which God has ordered all creation, using this same proportional logic in his discourse. In this way, Raphael draws on a rhetoric of propriety to explain God’s logic to Adam in terms suitable to Adam’s own “active Sphere,” this Sphere being the spiritual bounds within which Adam works and beyond which his spirit tends in his desire for unity with Godhead. Raphael clarifies for Adam his relative place on the great chain of being and the tendency of his spirit:

So from the root

Springs lighter the green stalk, from thence the leaves

More aery, lat the bright consummate flow’r

Spirits odorous breathes: flow’rs and thir fruit

Man’s nourishment, by gradual scale 364mperfe’d
To vital spirits aspire, to animal,
To intellectual, give both life and sense,
Fancy and understanding, whence the Soul
Reason receives, and reason is her being.

Discursive or Intuitive . . . (5.479-88)

Raphael explains the nature of the spirit to Adam using a metaphor of plant life, the materials of Adam’s sphere of activity in the garden. Raphael fits his discourse precisely to Adam’s understanding, slowly moving Adam from the plants he tends in the garden and fruit by which he is nourished and which he serves Raphael during their discourse, to a the faculty of reasoning and understanding that separates rational beings from one another. Though rational beings live in closer proximity to God and are endued with more of God’s spirit than irrational beings, even rational beings move in different spheres of activity in proportion to the degree of reason they are given by God.

Raphael acknowledges Adam’s “aspiration” by clarifying through his metaphor of vegetable, animal, and spiritual life the nature and growth tendencies of each variety of life, and by doing so defines for Adam the nature of aspiration itself—that the spirit of all life proceeds from and desires to return to and reunify with Godhead. Man’s degree of “aspiration” beyond the sphere of activity to which he has been assigned, Raphael explains, is in direct proportion to the

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134 See William Pallister’s *Between Worlds: The Rhetorical Universe of Paradise Lost*. Pallister argues that each of the poem’s characters can be identified by their “stylistic signatures,” which Pallister examines by their different uses of schemes and tropes. Raphael deploys the trope metonymy in his discourse with Adam, which, Pallister argues, Raphael uses to accommodate Adam’s limited understanding. Pallister refers to Raphael’s rhetorical posture toward Adam as one of “diminishment,” as compared to, say, Michael’s rhetoric of “prophesy,” which he accomplishes by the figure of distribution, apportioning identities and roles to Adam’s progeny in his prediction of the unfolding of divine providence.
degree of spirit, reason, and vitality he possesses directly from God. Raphael realizes the proportional logic of all creation by returning to the garden metaphor with which he opens his discourse to answer more directly Adam’s concern that the fruits he serves Raphael are unsuitable to the angel’s nature and accustomed diet:

Discursive or Intuitive; discourse

Is oftenest yours, the latter most is ours,

Differing but in degree, of kind the same.

Wonder not then, what God for you saw good

If I refuse not, but convert, as you,

To proper substance; time may come when men

With Angels may participate, and find

No inconvenient Diet, nor too light Fare:

And from these corporal nutriments

Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit,

Improved by tract of time, and wing’d ascend

Ethereal, as wee, or may at choice

Here or in Heav’nly Paradises dwell;

If you be found obedient, and retain
Unalterably from his love entire

Whose progeny you are. (5.486-503)

Raphael quickly checks the natural growth tendency he sees in man, which he also saw in the rebel angels’ desire or “appetite” to aspire beyond their assigned sphere of life and activity. Raphael’s speech is thus not only stylistically appropriate in his fitting his garden metaphor to Adam’s understanding and rhetorically appropriate in directly answering Adam’s question about angels’ accustomed diet, but also economically appropriate in his revealing man’s fitting response to God’s will and gift of light. Much like Adam’s proper cultivation of the plants in the garden, whose natural growth tends toward the sun’s light, Raphael comes to cultivate the proper growth tendencies in man himself and check those that are improper. It is God’s will that man “convert…To proper substance,” but like the vegetable life which fills Adam’s sphere of activity, such growth is slow; and growth that is too quick must be checked lest it challenge the natural order of things.135

Raphael’s work in the garden is thus to check Adam and Eve’s improper growth tendencies and admonish them to be continuously faithful, patient, and obedient until God finds it

135 Before the fall, Adam and Eve’s only labor was to cultivate the garden and check the growth of some plants in order to foster the growth of others:

On to their morning’s rural work they haste
    Among sweet dews and flow’rs; where any row
    Of fruit trees over-woody reached too far
    Their pampered boughs, and needed hands to check
    Fruitless embraces: (5.211-15)

Adam and Eve’s rural work imitates God’s work: His creation of the world out of chaos. Their very work serves as an admonition not to “reach too far” and aspire beyond their station. Raphael’s work in discoursing with Adam is to inform him of the proper way to aspire—not to Godhead, but rather toward Godhead.
fitting to permit their ascent from their assigned sphere of life and activity. Raphael advises Adam to “stand and wait” and “Meanwhile enjoy / [His] fill what happiness this happy state / Can comprehend, incapable of more” (5.503-05) until “Improv’d by tract of time” (5.498) God grants him the means of ascent: reason sufficient to comprehend or know as God knows, or rather approximate this knowledge, much like the angels themselves do. Adam thanks Raphael for this admonition, admitting that “Well hast thou taught the way that might direct / Our knowledge…whereon / In contemplation of created things / By steps we may ascend to God” (5.508-12). But Adam’s appetite is not yet satiated. His questions reveal that he aspires to contemplate beyond his natural sphere of activity and the scope of his reasoning capacity, aspirations which Milton describes at various places in *Paradise Lost* as “unnatural,” “perverse,” and “demonic” cravings for knowledge and power. Adam further interrogates Raphael’s admonition, asking his “propitious guest,”

But say,

What meant that caution join’d, *if ye be found*

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136 I use the term “aspiration” to show at once man’s degree of vital spirit and his desire for more. Milton uses the word “aspire” in several other places in *Paradise Lost*. Raphael’s discourse is the only place in *Paradise Lost* where man’s “aspiration” or “appetite” is considered natural. The line break that Milton inserts in Raphael’s discourse is suggestive, for if the reader reads the line with enjambment, Raphael appears to discuss man’s natural digestive processes: “flow’rs and thir fruit / Man’s nourishment, by gradual scale sublim’d / To vital spirits aspire” (5.482-84). On the other hand, reading line 483 without enjambment suggests that man desires nourishment beyond the natural or proper sphere of his life and action. The overwhelming majority of Milton’s uses of the word “aspire” in *Paradise Lost* describe the rebel angels’ desire for power. Among references to aspiration as “demonic” are 1.38, 2.7, 3.392, 4.62, 4.526, 6.90, 6.132, 6.383, 6.793, 6.899, 9.167, and 9.169. The only two other references to “aspiration” as human desire are in Book XII, where Milton uses “aspiration” to describe an evil tendency in man. That Milton’s only reference to natural aspiration appears in Raphael’s discourse in Book V suggests that Milton found the seeds of man’s fall from grace in man’s “aspiration” or “appetite,” for in the lines that follow his description of man’s potential for growth, Raphael checks man’s “appetite” to nourish his soul in closer proximity to God by advising him to “Meanwhile enjoy / Your fill what happiness this happy state / Can comprehend, incapable of more” (5.503-05) until tried and “Improv’d by tract of time . . . Here or in Heav’nly Paradises dwell; / If ye be found obedient” (5.498-501). Milton later shows in the calling and temptation of Christ in *Paradise Regained* that kairotic propriety—faithful, patient, and obedient waiting for the suitable time or occasion to speak or act—serves as the substance of man’s sphere of life and activity. Man sufficiently serves God by standing and waiting.
Obedient? can we want obedience then

To him, or possibly his love desert

Who form’d us from the dust, and plac’d us here

Full to the utmost measure of what bliss

Human desires can seek or apprehend? (5.512-18)

As God the Father’s discourse with His Son in Book III had anticipated, Adam’s question—Can we want obedience to him?—suggests that Adam begins to doubt the natural order and perhaps aspires to know things beyond the limits of his understanding. Indeed, Raphael’s answer to Adam serves to reinforce the sense of economic propriety that his errand to earth was designed to deliver. Raphael again cautions Adam more plainly to

Attend: That thou art happy, owe to God;

That thou continu’st such, owe to thyself,

That is, to thy obedience; therein stand.

This was that caution giv’n thee; be advis’d.

God made thee perfet, not immutable;

And good he made thee, but to persevere

He left it in thy power, ordain’d thy will

By nature free . . . [much like]

Myself and all th’ Angelic Host that stand
In sight of God 370mperfec’d, our happy state

Hold, as you yours, while our obedience holds;

On other surety none; freely we serve,

Because we freely love, as in our will

To love or not; in this we stand or fall:

And some are fall’n, to disobedience fall’n,

And so from Heav’n to deepest Hell; O fall

From what high state of bliss into what woe! (5.520-27; 535-43)

In this his plainer caution to Adam, Raphael draws on his prior admonition that Adam “retain / Unalterably firm his love entire / Whose progeny you are” (5.501-03), again advising Adam that “God made [him] perfe[c]t, not immutable” (5.524). Adam’s aspiration reveals his desire to ascend, even as Raphael reveals the consequences of wanting movement prematurely: “thy obedience; therein stand” (5.522). Movement within the prescribed limits of the garden is not the kind of movement Adam has in mind, though he does not yet possess the reasoning capacity to comprehend movement of any other kind. It is only fitting, then, that Adam would request Raphael to relate to him the story of the rebel angels’ fall, which at once whets his appetite even as it falls outside the scope of his understanding: “what thou tell’st / Hath past in Heav’n, some doubt within me move, / But more desire to hear, if thou consent” (5.553-55). Adam’s thoughts turn less to the likeness Raphael draws between his and the angelic host’s obedience and the obedience he advises Adam to practice, both of which suggest that Adam “stand still” and “wait,”
than to likeness Adam himself perceives in his desire to know beyond his capacity and the story of the rebel angels’ fall from grace.

Milton has Adam’s request to hear this narrative echo the silence that meets God the Father’s request (in Book III) whether there is one so charitable in heaven who would trade life for life and redeem man’s fall. Both man’s challenge to God’s economic propriety in becoming “Author to himself” in his disobedience and fall from grace, as well as its redemption in the Son’s promise to assume man’s corporal form and mortal punishment, are met with silence on earth and in heaven. As Adam observes, Raphael’s “full relation” of the rebel angels’ disobedience and fall, “which must needs be strange, / [is] Worthy of Sacred silence to be heard” (5.556-57). Raphael’s reluctance to tell the tale also reflects Adam’s “doubt” (5.554)—that these secrets are outside Adam’s sphere of knowledge and activity and therefore little befitting one so unfit to hear them. Adam admits the first rhetorical impropriety, which implies the economic impropriety that motivates his desire to know, when he says to Raphael,

    Thy words

    Attentive, and with more delighted ear

    Divine instructor, I have heard, than when

    Cherubic Songs by night from neighboring Hills

    Aereal Music send: (5.544-48)

Adam’s admission renders that “doubt within [him] move, / But more desire to hear” (5.554-55) all the more inappropriate, for the movement Raphael’s narrative inspires is doubt, not faith, and desire, not patience—“doubt” and “desire” being the cause of the rebel angels’ fall. Raphael notes
the change in Adam, and unlike the free and easy discourse—the garden metaphor—he had before used to liken heaven to earth so that Adam might properly comprehend the great chain of being (and becoming), Raphael questions the rhetorical propriety of his impending discourse and the economic propriety upon which his sharing of heavenly secrets with Adam may cast a shadow and doubt. Raphael even questions his own relation as casting shadow and doubt, though he continues with the narrative, thinking it may profit Adam to hear it:

High matter thou injoin’st me, O prime of men,

Sad task and hard, for how shall I relate

To human sense th’ invisible exploits

Of warring Spirits; how without remorse

The ruin of so many glorious once

And perfet while they stood; how last unfold

The secrets of another World, perhaps

Not lawful to reveal? yet for thy good

This is dispens’t, and what surmounts the reach

Of human sense, I shall delineate so,

By lik’ning spiritual to corporal forms,

As may express them best, though what if Earth

Be but the shadow of Heav’n, and things therein
Milton’s reference to “Earth” as “but the shadow of Heav’n” suggests Plato’s (and Cicero’s) doctrine of the earth as the “simulacrum” of eternity. Raphael doubts whether it is “lawful” for him to reveal heaven’s secrets to Adam, not merely because he questions his own ability to “delineate” in the language of men the “invisible exploits” that exceed “human sense,” but also because he questions how his rhetoric might change Adam. Raphael’s former likening of spiritual and corporal forms in his garden metaphor clarified rather than shadowed Adam’s proper place in the world. The “simulacra” he now intends to relate to Adam’s sense may in fact move Adam to idolatry—the same doubt and desire that had caused the rebel angels’ fall. The doubt and desire already moving and mutating Adam also mutate the discursive strategies Raphael uses to communicate with Adam; strategies once rhetorically effective are altered into rhetorical impropriety.

Adam and Raphael’s discourse directly anticipates man’s temptation and fall from grace, which Milton introduces in Book IX of *Paradise Lost*. Once more, Milton repeats the doctrine of right reason, but this time, Adam discusses with Eve what he has learned from Raphael. Adam relates Raphael’s warning to Eve—that the Adversary moves about the garden and that Adam and Eve ought to remain vigilant. Eve questions Adam much like Adam had questioned Raphael, Eve’s doubt and desire for a wider circuit setting the stage for her temptation. Eve desires that they “divide [their] labors” (9.214) that might check the garden’s extraordinary growth, which might overwhelm them should they work side-by-side while the threat of the Adversary is still present. Adam realizes that “Subtle [the Adversary] needs must be, who could seduce / Angels” (9.307-08); therefore, he encourages Eve to remain by his side, contending that “The Enemy, though bold, w[ould] hardly dare” to assail them both together (9.304). Eve interprets Adam’s
argument as a slight against her constancy and integrity so that she persists in her desire to move beyond Adam’s circumspection, which Eve perceives as Adam’s (and God’s) circumscription of her movement:

If this be our condition, [Eve asserts,] thus to dwell

In narrow circuit strait’n’d by a Foe,

Subtle or violent, we not endu’d

Single with like defense, wherever met,

How are we happy, still in fear of harm? (9.322-26)

Eve remains unconvinced of the subtlety of their adversary, who, as Adam argues, had deceived the angels whose gift of reason exceeds their own. Adam continues to argue that they ought to meet this foe together if they are to resist his wiles. Adam’s argument, however, would render Eve an idol rather than his “helpmeet”: “I from the influence of thy looks receive,” says Adam, “Access in every Virtue, in thy sight / More wise, more watchful, stronger . . . . Why shouldst not thou like sense within thee feel / When I am present . . . ?” (9.309-11; 315-16). Just as Adam admits that he aspires to be angelic over the course of his conversation with Raphael, so too does Eve admit that she aspires to be considered equal to Adam. Like Adam, whose doubt arises at the moment he desires, Eve’s desire to prove herself Adam’s equal—“endu’d / Single with like defense, wherever met” (9.324-25)—creates the possibility for doubt.

Eve questions her place on the great chain of being when she challenges Adam’s confidence in their ability to “stand alone,” so that Adam feels it necessary to address Eve’s false assumption that she wants freedom and movement, for freedom of will is of God, not of Adam.
By challenging Adam, then, Eve challenges the wisdom of God’s divine decree: “Let us not then suspect our happy State,” says Eve, “Left so imperfect by the Maker wise, / As not secure to single or combined. / Frail is our happiness, if this be so, / And Eden were no Eden thus expos’d” (9.337-41). Even though she qualifies her conclusion as a condition—“if this be so”—Eve still concludes that the presence of the Adversary in Eden casts doubt upon the Creator’s wisdom and perfection. Eve’s desire to stand alone causes her to question the Maker’s economic propriety in the created order, which positions Adam to repeat the doctrine of right reason to Eve much like Raphael explained the same doctrine to Adam when he encountered Adam’s desire and doubt. Adam explains to Eve that

    best are all things as the will

    Of God ordain’d them, his creting hand

    Nothing imperfect or deficient left

    Of all that he Created, much less Man,

    Or aught that might his happy State secure,

    Secure from outward force; within himself

    The danger lies, yet lies within his power:

    Against his will he can receive no harm.

    But god left free the Will, for what obeys

    Reason, is free, and Reason he made right….

    Not then mistrust, but tender love enjoins,
That I should mind thee oft, and mind thou mee.

Firm we subsist, yet possible to swerve,

Since Reason not impossibly may meet

Some specious object by the Foe suborn’d,

And fall into deception unaware,

Not keeping strictest watch, as she was warn’d. (9.343-52; 357-63)

Adam urges Eve to consider how her reason might be swayed by deception, which, like Adam’s own reasoning capacity, has never encountered deception. Like Raphael’s recognition of the danger that lurks within Adam himself, Adam here cautions Eve that God made humanity perfect, “Secure from outward force,” but suggests that freedom and contentment can still be realized by standing still and waiting. When Eve again persists, Adam speaks more plainly the doctrine he wishes to impart: “Seek not temptation then, which to avoid / Were better, and most likely if from mee / Thou sever not: Trial will come unsought” (9.364-66). Eve has it within her power to prove her faith in God by remaining patient: “Wouldst though approve thy constancy,” observes Adam, “approve / First thy obedience” (9.367-68). Like Raphael, however, who questions the “lawfulness” of sharing with Adam the secrets of heaven, Adam finally succumbs to Eve’s persistence and tells her to “Go; for thy stay, not free, absents thee more . . . God towards thee hath done his part, do thine” (9.372; 375). Eve’s desire sets the stage for her doubting of her own strength, which moves her to risk temptation alone; her doubting of Adam’s love, which causes her to misinterpret the motive of his argument as mistrust; and ultimately, her doubting of God, which causes her to question the perfection of creation and thus to confuse freedom without (i.e. external movement) with freedom within (i.e. reason as deliberation). Like Adam’s rhetorical
impropriety, therefore, Eve’s rhetoric challenges the propriety and perfection of God’s created order, which creates the condition of her fall—a condition she ironically points out in her discourse with Adam before she chose to leave his side: “Frail is our happiness, if this be so” (9.340).

In each of these discourses—God the Father with His Son, Raphael with Adam, and Adam with Eve—Milton dramatizes the doctrine of right reason and anticipates the verbal conflict that will lead to its failure. Seeing the unfolding of time in eternity, God the Father understands that He has created angel and man perfect, but free to stand or fall by their choices. The only movement Milton suggests in these lines is “falling,” which evidences the failure of patience and obedience, the failure to stand and wait. God the Father understands that aspiration—the breath of life—creates movement, inasmuch as it creates the desire to move closer to God; however, Milton uses the word “aspiration” in an affirmative sense only once in Paradise Lost, suggesting that the angels and men who aspire too much too soon fall from grace. Milton thus offers in Paradise Lost the failure of kairotic propriety and its consequences, which is most plainly demonstrated in Raphael’s discourse with Adam and Adam’s discourse with Eve. Raphael admits the heavenly secret that man can change his station, become mobile, and move outside the limits prescribed by the garden. This movement is paradoxically won, however, by remaining stationary, obediently working and patiently waiting in the garden, enjoying and praising God for the gift of life he has been given. To want more than the sphere of activity to which he has been assigned is natural, but Raphael warns Adam that he and Eve must wait until the proper time when God sees fit to permit them to walk among the angels. Adam’s discourse hints at his impatience. Adam’s discourse with Eve realizes the consequences of impatient discourse, which translates into disobedient action when Eve wants to move outside the scope of Adam’s circumspection, for she perceives his prudent observance of Raphael’s warning to watch
over each other as circumscription. She misinterprets Adam’s words as mistrusting her obedience, which ironically fails when she ventures outside Adam’s circumspection and transgresses God’s only circumscription. If in *Paradise Lost* Milton shows the consequences of aspiring for too much too soon, then in *Paradise Regained* Milton offers the person of Christ as his perfect or complete orator, whose skill in verbal conflict is directly contingent upon his sense of kairotic propriety. In much the same way that Christian ethics inverts classical ethics, in *Paradise Regained* Christ defeats Satan with discourse, not arms, and his discourse demonstrates a patient mind faithful and obedient to God’s will, which is known only to God and unfolds in an expanse of time that God deems appropriate. In *Paradise Regained*, then, Milton offers kairotic propriety—patiently waiting for the appropriate time and place to speak and act—as the substance of Christian ethics.

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Chapter 5, Part 3

Milton’s *Paradise Regained* and the Recovery of Kairotic Propriety:

Silent and Patient Waiting as the Substance of Christian Ethics

As he does in *Paradise Lost*, Milton opens *Paradise Regained* appealing to epic convention, invoking the muse and giving the suggestion that his Christian hero is no mere classical martial hero, but rather serves to revise both epic convention and the virtues it extols. As in the prefatory material to *Paradise Lost*, Milton once more suggests in *Paradise Regained* that his poem tests the sphere of life and activity to which God has assigned humanity, for he asks his muse to “bear [him] through height or depth of nature’s bounds” (1.13). But much like the subject of his epic, Milton observes kairotic propriety, first waiting until he has reached, like his classical predecessors, full poetic maturity before he ventures into epic poetry and, second, considering his own time and place as the appropriate time and place to sing of Jesus’s redemption of man, so that he might “tell of deeds / Above Heroic [in the classical, martial sense], though in secret done, / And unrecorded left through many an Age, / Worthy t’ have not remain’d so long unsung” (1.15-17). Milton wants God’s inspiration lest he stand mute and Jesus’s heroic deeds in the “Desert, his Victorious Field / Against the Spiritual Foe” (1.9-10), remain unrecorded. Much in *Paradise Lost* is therefore reflected in *Paradise Regained*: the place where Jesus confronts Satan mirrors the “waste Wilderness” (1.7) into which Adam and Eve had reduced Eden; Jesus’s obedience, which regains “paradise within,” revises Adam and Eve’s disobedience, which lost them paradise without; Jesus’s patient, contemplative, waiting words echoes Adam and Eve’s impassioned, inquisitive, and reaching words; and finally, and most importantly, Jesus’s verbal
confrontation with Satan on earth suggests the Son’s martial confrontation with Satan and the other rebel angels in heaven, and Jesus’s trial reflects Eve and Adam’s temptation.

Milton returns time and again to Jesus’s exercising both patience and obedience as the means of defeating Satan’s attempts to draw him out before the appropriate time. Even more significant for Milton in *Paradise Regained*, however, are not the stratagems Satan uses to draw Jesus out, nor the words Jesus uses to foil them; rather, Milton appears to be more interested in the end (time) that Jesus has in mind—the “revelation” that motivates his words and his waiting, a revelation whose time and place is known to God alone. In Jesus’s patient words and obedient inaction, which becomes the Christian inversion of classical heroism, Milton illustrates that faith in the future fulfillment of God’s justice and mercy—whereby “the last will be first, and the first will be last”—is indeed the substance of the Christian ethos. Milton’s desire to “assert Eternal Providence / And justify the ways of God to men” (1.24-25), which he offers as the core argument of *Paradise Lost*, he typologically fulfills in *Paradise Regained* by offering its readers Adam’s antitype in Jesus. Jesus is the “embodiment” of the Scriptures’ message to stand faithful, patient, and obedient to God’s Will and Word until God sees fit to reveal the workings of Eternal Providence. Jesus models for humanity how it is they should stand and wait—with faith, patience, and obedience until God’s Revelation. Milton’s central argument in *Paradise Regained* is thus for readers to embrace Jesus’s sense of kairotic propriety and the Christian inversion it entails as the substance of Christian ethics.137

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137 Milton also understood his own life and time typologically in that he saw the English people as modern-day Israelites and his political-poetical project as, in part, the means of preparing the nation for the second coming of Jesus. The imminence of the second coming gives some sense of urgency to the Christian’s life, even as the time and place is known only to God. Milton understood that the other forms of Christian propriety are perfected through trials of patience and obedience to God’s Will and Word, trials which require Christians to fit (outfit?) themselves for the moment of revelation. As several species of judgment contingent upon Christians’ capacity for right reason, Christian propriety is directly contingent upon kairotic propriety—the moment that God in his infinite wisdom sees fit to reveal heaven to earth during
As in *Paradise Lost*, and in accordance with epic convention, Milton envisions the “field” on which Jesus and the Adversary meet as a “battlefield.” But even though there is the threat of physical violence, Jesus and Satan are “Spiritual Foe[s]” first, and the tactics and stratagems they use are purely rhetorical. Milton’s interest in the rhetorical “contest” thus becomes the material of this epic, which becomes clear at its opening in Book 1 when in discourse with the angel Gabriel God shares part of his divine plan:

But first I mean

To exercise [Jesus] in the Wilderness;

There he shall first lay down the rudiments

Of his great warfare, ere I send him forth

To conquer Sin and Death the two grand foes,

which Christians’ propriety, which amounts to Christians’ sense of moral and ethical good judgment, will in turn be judged.

138 Milton’s attitude toward rhetoric has itself been a topic of much critical debate. Ronald Cooley, for instance, traces this critical debate in his essay “Reformed Eloquence: Inability, Questioning, and Correction in *Paradise Lost*,” and sets out to mediate between opposing critical positions on Milton’s view of eloquence—the one being that Milton distrusted rhetoric and the other being that he embraced it. Representative of the former view is Thomas Sloane, who in *Donne, Milton, and the End of Humanist Rhetoric* argues for an anti-rhetorical Milton, claiming that Milton shunned the rhetorical mode of thinking, which “revel[s] in ambiguity and skepticism,” most “exemplified by the character Satan” (249). For Sloane, and others, Satanic discourse is “rhetorical,” by which he means “duplicitous.” Representative of the latter view is Irene Samuel, who argues in “Milton on the Province of Rhetoric” that “when Milton compared Satan-in-the-Serpent…to ‘some orator renowned / In Athens or free Rome, where eloquence / Flourished, since mute’ (*PL* 9.670-72), he was hardly equating eloquence with trickery.” Rather, says Samuel, “[Milton’s] supposed distrust of rhetoric has been foisted on him by those unwilling to make distinctions such as he himself habitually made” (177). In “Reformed Eloquence,” Cooley mediates between Sloane’s view and Samuel’s view “by describing the ways in which *Paradise Lost* attempts both to define and practice a reformed eloquence, a rhetoric clearly dependent on classical and humanist conventions, but stripped of the duplicity of Satan’s discourse” (232). I would argue that it is part of Milton’s conception of stylistic decorum to illustrate a “rhetoric of propriety” by contrasting the “duplicity of Satanic discourse” with a reformed Christian rhetoric, as exemplified in the right (i.e. logically reasonable) and righteous (i.e. Scripturally sound) discourse of Jesus, who is becoming (and thus speaking what is becoming of) Christ.
By Humiliation and strong Sufferance:

His weakness shall o’ercome Satanic strength

And all the world, and mass of sinful flesh;

That all the Angels and Ethereal Powers,

They now, and men hereafter, may discern

From what consummate virtue I have chose

This perfect Man, by merit call’d my Son,

To earn Salvation for the Sons of men. (1.155-67)

The only speaking part God the Father has in *Paradise Regained*, Milton uses it to show his readers that this epic is of apiece with *Paradise Lost*, and that he is still realizing his former exigency by “assert[ing] Eternal Providence / And justify[ing] the ways of God to men” (1.24-25). Milton also reveals in this passage that he continues to work with the Christian inversion of classical virtue—that it is “By Humiliation and strong Sufferance” that Jesus’s “weakness shall o’ercome Satanic strength” (1.160-61). The rhetorical “contest” into which God is about to lead his Son will give him sufficient opportunity to “exercise” his logical and rhetorical skills, which God the Father understands as the “rudiments / Of [t]his great [spiritual] warfare” (1.156-58).  

139 See Chapter 5, Part 1, “The ‘Contracted Palm’ to the ‘Open Hand’: Milton’s ‘Martial Muse’ Reconsidered,” for a more developed discussion of Milton’s perception of logical and rhetorical contest as discursive “battle” or verbal “warfare.” In *Of Education*, Milton uses metaphors of war to emphasize the importance of logical and rhetorical exercises to prepare students for real discursive confrontation, whether legal, political, or religious, and in several other of his prose tracts, Milton returns to this conception of logic and rhetoric as strategies to advance his point.
Even as Milton perceives the argumentative strength that logical and rhetorical propriety—as words aptly wrought and fitting their rhetorical situation—carry in the verbal contest, he also perceives the strength of silence and contemplation. Milton understands that God the Father has His Son enter the wilderness not so much to exercise his sense of logical and rhetorical propriety, but rather to test his faith, patience, and obedience—his sense of kairotic propriety, his ability to wait for the most appropriate time to speak and act. As Milton demonstrates in this epic, Jesus patiently awaits the end of Satan’s discourse before starting his own, which suggests that Jesus is always on the defensive in this verbal contest. He never engages the Adversary in discourse; he merely replies to the Adversary’s discourse. Although the occasion of his action and defeat of the Adversary is known only to God, Jesus has spent his entire life until this moment cultivating a sense of logical and rhetorical propriety based squarely in the Scriptures, which he will later embody in his earthly ministry. Therefore, as God intends, Jesus

One day forth walk’d alone, the Spirit leading,

And his deep thoughts, the better to converse

With solitude, till far from track of men,

Thought following thought, and step by step led on,

... 

His holy Meditations thus pursu’d. (1.189-95)

Milton refers to Jesus’s desire to enter the wilderness to be tempted by Satan as the first step toward “Publish[ing] his Godlike office now mature” (1.188). Jesus’s reflections characterize his
coming ministry as an oratorical office, for which, even as a child, he had a craving that “ill 
sorted” (i.e. “ill suited”) one of his age. Jesus reflects that “While I was yet a child, no childish 
play / To me was pleasing, all my mind was set / Serious to learn and know, and thence to do / 
What might be public good” (1.201-04). The improprieties of precociousness and perhaps too 
strong desire for learning that “ill suited” Jesus’s character as a child also helped to develop in 
him a desire for logical and rhetorical propriety based solely in the right interpretation of the 
Scriptures.

Early in his life, Milton writes, Jesus understood his calling to the ministry—that he was 
“Born to that end, born to promote all truth” (1.205) in the Scriptures—and so he sought to hear 
the Scriptures rightly taught by learned doctors, but ended up teaching the Scriptures to the 
learned doctors instead:

therefore above my years,

The Law of God I read, and found it sweet,

Made it my whole delight, and in it grew

To such perfection that, ere yet my age

Had measur’d twice six years, at our great Feast

I went into the Temple, there to hear

The Teachers of our Law, and to propose

What might improve my knowledge or their own;

And was admir’d by all: yet this not all
To which my Spirit aspir’d . . . . (1.206-15)

Jesus’s precocious talk with the learned doctors of the Law shows that he early in life began
perfecting his understanding of the Scriptures, the knowledge of which would prepare him not
only for the ministry, but also cultivate in him the sense of logical and rhetorical propriety
necessary to become a perfect or complete Christian orator. Milton here engages with the
classical debate over the orator’s education and training, which Cicero and Quintilian both had
argued should not be entered into prematurely. For Milton, the application of pagan ethics is
indeed a matter of timeliness—of kairotic propriety—that one ought not to undergo trials without
first possessing the proper natural ability and education.¹⁴₀ Jesus’s natural abilities and his
precocious desire for the learning that would develop these abilities suggests that, for Milton,
Jesus was already the perfect or complete orator when still a child.

As in Paradise Lost, Milton once again uses the word “aspir’d” in the preceding passage
to describe Jesus’s early desire to “promote all truth” in the world, but unlike the angels and men
who fell from God’s grace, Jesus later comes to revise his aspirations by first redirecting them to

¹⁴₀ Quintilian argues in the first book of his Institutes of Oratory, for instance, that “proper timing” is the
most important factor when weighing the efficacy of the orator’s education—that once a student has
mastered the grammatical instruction necessary for learning eloquence, he is to be immediately removed
from the teachers of grammar and committed to the teachers of rhetoric. Quintilian deplores the common
practice of leaving a student with the grammarian too long or committing him too early to the teacher of
rhetoric if student’s natural abilities do not warrant the move:

Do we not know that it was a kind of exercise among the ancients, suitable for improvement in
eloquence, for pupils to speak on theses, commonplaces, and other questions (without embracing
particular circumstances or persons), on which causes, as well real as imaginary, depend? . . . .
These weapons are in some degree to be prepared that we may use them whenever the
circumstances require. He who shall suppose that these matters do not concern the orator will
think that a statue is not begun when its limbs are cast. Nor let any one blame this haste of mine
(as some will consider it) on the supposition that I think the pupil who is to be committed to the
professor of rhetoric is to be altogether withdrawn from the teachers of grammar. To these also
their proper time shall be allowed . . . . (1.9-13)

Quintilian addresses kairotic propriety as the most important factor of the orator’s education: the student’s
education in eloquence should not commence before he is ready so that the student is ready to wield the
“weapons of eloquence” most suitable to the circumstances in which he finds himself, and whenever the
circumstances require their use. For Quintilian, kairotic propriety is the basis for rhetorical propriety.
the sphere of life and activity to which God has assigned him and then waiting patiently for the proper occasion in which God’s will might be revealed to him. During this same meditation on his adolescence, then, Jesus admits that

this [was] not all

To which my Spirit aspir’d; victorious deeds

Flam’d in my heart, heroic acts; one while

To rescue Israel from the Roman yoke,

Then to subdue and quell o’er all the earth

Brute violence and proud Tyrannic pow’r,

Till truth were freed, and equity restor’d: (1.215-20)

But such aspirations do not realize God’s plan for Jesus, which Jesus later discovers. As in Paradise Lost, Milton here turns classical heroism and the virtues that shape it on its head: “Brute violence” turns into “winning words” and the conqueror becomes “victorious” by being conquered:

Yet [I] held it more humane, [says Jesus] more heavenly, first

By winning words to conquer willing hearts,

And make persuasion do the work of fear;

At least to try, and teach the erring Soul

Not wilfully misdoing, but unaware
Misled: the stubborn only to subdue. (1.221-26)

Jesus realizes his purpose, which he describes as “more humane, more heavenly,” once he revises the classical virtues that shape his sense of ethics. He develops a Christian ethics grounded in the Word and realized through words, not violence, though the metaphors Jesus uses still possess traces of the classical virtues inherent in military might; for indeed he says it is his purpose to “conquer willing hearts” and “the stubborn only to subdue.”

Jesus’s interest in rhetorical propriety, in shaping his words that he might in his ministry of God’s Word “win . . . willing hearts” and “subdue” the “stubborn,” necessitates that he learn kairotic propriety first. His trials in the wilderness are meant to prepare him to become the perfect or complete orator, whose sense of proper timing is directly contingent upon God’s revealing of His plan and Jesus’s purpose. At the moment of his baptism, then, Jesus discovers that he is to be led into the desert to be tempted and that this trial is to prepare him for his ministry:

    my Father’s voice,

    Audibly heard from Heav’n, pronounc’d me his,

    Mee his beloved Son, in whom alone

    He was well pleas’d; by which I knew the time

    Now full, that I no more should live obscure,

    But openly begin, as best becomes

    The Authority which I deriv’d from Heaven.

    And now by some strong motion I am led
Into this Wilderness, to what intent
I learn not yet; perhaps I need not know;
For what concerns my knowledge God reveals. (1.283-93)

Milton emphasizes in this passage that kairotic propriety is the substance of Jesus’s ministry, for kairotic propriety informs the typological rhetoric of the Scriptures. Jesus embodies the Scriptures’ rhetoric, thus fulfilling Old Testament prophesies, but he does so only in “the fullness of time” (Gal. 4.4). Until now, Jesus has lived “obscure,” patiently meditating on the Scriptures and awaiting God’s revelation of the part he will play in Eternal Providence, which Jesus does not know. That Milton is interested in kairotic propriety as the substance of rhetorical and economic propriety is apparent not merely in his reference to Jesus’s faith in “knowing” only when the “time [is] full,” but also Jesus’s learning that his open ministry of the Word “best becomes / The Authority which [he] deriv’d from Heaven.”

Jesus’s baptism is the summation of a life until now directed toward his learning rhetorical propriety—his suiting his words to the Word of God—and it is in this moment that the Spirit of God descends to Jesus, who becomes the Scriptures’ Authority by embodying both the writings and their authority. God’s “pronouncement” thus closes the hermeneutic circle between kairotic propriety and economic propriety, for now in the fullness of time and in fulfillment of Scriptural prophesy, God has passed his authority to Jesus. It is in rhetorical propriety—Jesus’s ministry—that the Scriptures and their authority will be realized.

Milton dramatizes in Paradise Regained those virtues that allow Jesus to defeat his adversary. They stem directly from his faith in the Scriptures—his patient, obedient waiting for the fulfillment of Old Testament prophesies in the fullness of time. The overarching argument of

141 My emphasis.
Milton’s epics, whereby he “assert[s] Eternal Providence / And justify[s] the ways of God to
critics” (1.24-25), requires that Milton himself know as Jesus knows, so that he may see the limited
sphere of his life and activity in the fullness of time. Milton encourages his readers to know by
faith in the Scriptures alone, which is his definition of ratio recta or “right reason” as humanity’s
capacity to reason rightly on account of their faith in the Scriptures. Milton illustrates in the life
and temptation of Jesus that the practice of right reason, or sense of rhetorical propriety, is
directly contingent upon the Christian’s sense of kairotic propriety, which is the Christian’s faith
that in the fullness of time—at a time deemed appropriate from the beginning of the Word—
revelations of Eternal Providence in the Scriptures and on earth will be fulfilled. In Paradise
Regained, Milton thus offers readers his sense of Christian ethics in the only model of perfect or
complete rhetorical propriety needed to understand it—in Jesus himself.

Jesus’s temptation, and thus his use of rhetorical propriety, begins shortly after he enters
the wilderness, where he is at once accosted by “an aged man in Rural weeds” (1.314). The
disguise Satan dons to tempt Jesus reflects the disguise Archimago had donned to deceive
Spenser’s Knight of Holiness in the Wood of Error. Jesus wanders the wilderness, but not in
error. His purpose is clear, and he immediately recognizes the “Swain” as Satan and his words as
lies. Jesus meets Satan’s ironically “wrongheaded” suggestion that Jesus has somehow lost his
way and is in need of guidance by replying, “Who brought me hither / Will bring me hence, no
other Guide I seek” (1.335-36). Jesus’s faith defeats Satan’s first attempt to lead him astray, his
first appeal being to his obedience in God’s way and plan for him. Jesus also makes it known to
Satan that he knows him for who he really is, but in a seeming parenthetical aside which suggests

142 I italicize alone as an echo of the Protestant mantra “sola scriptura, sola fide” and to observe Milton’s
many references in Paradise Regained to the virtues of solitude for the purpose of contemplating God’s
word and one’s place and role in Eternal Providence. As Jesus makes his way into the desert to be tempted,
for instance, he is “with such thoughts / Accompanied of things past and to come / Lodg’d in his breast, as
well might recommend / Such Solitude before choicest Society” (1.299-302).
that Satan will work nothing by deceit: “(For I discern thee [says Jesus] other than thou seem’st)” (1.348). Jesus unmasks Satan by his rhetorical improprieties, arguing that Satan’s argumentative strategies beget error because they have been begotten in error:

That hath been thy craft,

By mixing somewhat true to vent more lies.

But what have been thy answers, what but dark,

Ambiguous and with double sense deluding.

Which they who ask’d have seldom understood,

And not well understood, as good not known? (1.432-37)

Jesus offers Satan an ironical statement of his own, whose double meaning mocks Satan even as it aims to teach him the truth of his spiritual condition. Jesus quotes Satan’s speech in *Paradise Lost*, in which Satan rationalizes his and the rebel angels’ fall from heaven. Unlike the faithful angels and prelapsarian Adam, whose closer proximity to God affords them clearer understanding and right reason, Satan argues for distance from God, which convolutes his reasoning capacity and corrupts his rhetoric with improprieties. Satan thus sounds hell in *Paradise Lost*, his newly-appointed sphere of life and activity:

Is [Hell] the Region, this the Soil, the Clime,

Said then the lost Arch-Angel, this the seat

That we must change for Heav’n, this mournful gloom

For that celestial light? Be it so, since he
Who now is Sovran can dispose and bid

What shall be right: fardest from him is best

Whom reason hath equall’d, force hath made supreme

Above his equals. Farewell happy Fields

Where Joy for ever dwells: Hail horrors, hail

Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell

Receive thy new Possessor: One who brings

A mind not to be chang’d by Place or Time.

This mind is its own place, and in itself

Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n. (1.242-55)

Even after his defeat and fall from heaven, Satan challenges God’s sovereignty. God’s military force Satan must acknowledge, for he and his army were routed from heaven; but Satan would still challenge God’s “reason” inasmuch as Satan’s reason has already been corrupted by his desire to move beyond the proper sphere of his life and activity to which God had assigned him in heaven. He again questions God’s economic propriety as the head of the celestial hierarchy, and his line of questioning results in both rhetorical and kairotic improprieties that take their shape from the economic impropriety that led to his fall: “thou profoundest Hell / Receive they new Possessor” (1.252). That Satan would dispossess God of Hell, over which he has as much dominion as heaven and earth, suggests that his reason capacity has been corrupted beyond all recognition, so much so that he paradoxically argues that the occasion of his fall has changed his
“place,” but not his mind. Satan argues that he creates his own sense of propriety: economic in being God’s “equal” as Sovran of Hell; rhetorical in “hailing” hell as his new and rightful dominion, and revising his former understanding of “What shall be right: fardest from him is best” (1.247); kairotic in recreating the occasion of his fall as a boon, after which he discovers his power to create the proper time and place as a condition of his mind rather than merely respond to it as a revelation of God’s divine will.

The irony that Jesus’s response suggests in *Paradise Regained* is that Satan predicates his entire argument on the mistaken assumption that his mind still reflects the light of God’s right reason and so remains eternal and unchanged. Satan argues that in Hell’s new Possessor is “One who brings / A mind not be chang’d by Place or Time” (1.252-53); and yet that is precisely what happened when Satan fell from heaven. His reasoning capacity, now corrupted by its distance from God, has indeed changed and creates the illusion that heaven was a hell the rebel angels left to inherit the hell that is now their heaven. In heaven, the rebel angels served the Will of God; in hell, they serve their own wills. The negative freedom at the heart of Satan’s argument Jesus thus exposes in parodying Satan’s words: “So never more in Hell than when in Heaven. / But thou are [yet] serviceable to Heaven’s King” (1.420-21). Jesus admits that God has allowed Satan to escape from hell, walk the earth and, on occasion, enter “Into the Heav’n of Heavens” (1.410). However, he enters heaven a captive, painfully aware that he has lost his former “place [among all the host of heaven] where he before had sat / Among the Prime in Splendor” (1.412-13). Satan’s negative freedom is merely an illusion he has created, of which his presence in heaven—“spectacle of ruin and scorn” (1.415)—only serves to remind him. Jesus also reminds Satan that even as God’s Adversary, he still “serviceable to Heaven’s King.” Jesus’s words everywhere turn

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143 In several places in *Paradise Lost*, Milton treats the doctrine that no matter where Satan finds himself, he brings hell with him; that hell is in fact a part of him. Along with 1.255 are 4.20 and 9.467-68.
Satan’s improprieties on their head, resituating Satan as God’s servant, even though he is God’s enemy, and reinforcing the sense of economic propriety that Satan challenges in his speech.

Jesus’s rhetoric not only reveals the truth of Satan’s now improper place among the faithful angelic host, but also hints at the restoration of kairotic propriety in his statement that Satan remains “serviceable to Heaven’s [right and rightful] King.” Jesus’s suggestion is that in the fullness of time, of which Satan is no longer aware having lost his share of light, reason, and eternity in losing his former place and proximity to God, God will reveal to Satan his part in the divine plan. Only after Jesus’s discourse does Satan acknowledge that he prefers lies and deceit to truth, for “Hard are the ways of truth, and rough to walk, / Smooth on the tongue discourst, pleasing to th’ ear . . . What wonder then I if delight to hear / Her dictates from thy mouth?” (1.478-82). Satan reveals his own rhetorical impropriety in these lines, for he admits the disconnect he desires between speech and actions. Corrupt speech and reason relate things not as they are, but as the speaker would wish them to be, the speaker’s perversion of ethics. Although Satan admits that Jesus “art plac’t above [him, and that Jesus] is Lord” (1.475), Jesus knows Satan’s mind, even if Satan would prefer rhetoric to reality: “Thy coming hither, [concludes Jesus] though I know thy scope, / I bid not or forbid; do as thou find’st / Permission from above; thou canst not more” (1.494-96). Jesus’s words again reveal the scope of Satan’s actions, even though Satan’s thoughts and words tell him otherwise. Jesus thus corrects Satan’s corrupted logic and rhetorical improprieties by time and again appealing to kairotic propriety—that Satan can only “do as [he] find’st / Permission from above,” for what he does is “serviceable” in God’s divine plan.

Milton closes Book 1 of *Paradise Regained* with Jesus’s sense of kairotic propriety as the substance of Christian ethics, which he makes apparent at the opening of Book 2, where he treats
the anticipation of those “new-baptiz’d, who [meanwhile] yet remain’d / at Jordan with the Baptist” after witnessing the coming of Jesus “whom they heard so late expressly call’d / Jesus Messiah, Son of God declar’d” (2.1-4). Milton relates Jesus’s disciples’ doubts in the wake of Jesus’s absence:

Now missing him thir joy so lately found,

So lately found, and so abruptly gone,

[The people] began to doubt, and doubted many days,

And as the days increas’d, increas’d their doubt: (2.9-12)

The people’s expectation of the Messiah’s coming is frustrated by his unexpected departure and lengthy absence. Milton shows that it is Jesus’s absence that tests Christians’ faith, patience, and obedience, much like God’s absence in the wilderness tests Jesus’s faith, patience, and obedience. In Jesus’s absence, his disciples risk falling into confusion, the consequences of which Milton has already related in Paradise Lost. Milton thus writes of Jesus’s absence and his disciples’ uneasy expectation of his return:

Now, now, for sure, deliverance is at hand,

The Kingdom shall to Israel be restored:

Thus we rejoic’d, but soon our joy is turn’d

Into perplexity and new amaze:

For whither is he gone, what accident

Hath rapt him from us? will he now retire
After appearance, and again prolong

Our expectation? (2.35-42)

The exercise of right reason requires faith, which brings one into closer proximity to God, even when God appears absent. Hell, which Satan brings with him wherever he goes, results directly from Satan’s faithlessness, which distances him from the mind of God and likewise renders him impatient and disobedient. Milton contrasts the people’s impatient expectation of Jesus’s return with Mary’s patient waiting, during which she reflects upon her son’s “absence now / Thus long to some great purpose he obscures. / But I to wait with patience am inur’d” (2.100-02). Mary’s faith allows her to perceive rightly Jesus’s “great purpose,” even though the means and ends of that purpose outside the scope of her understanding. Unlike Adam, who questions Raphael about the scope of his sphere of life and activity, Mary patiently awaits God’s revelation of her and her son’s purpose in the divine plan.

Milton thus offers kairotic propriety as a check against his readers’ lack of faith in prophesies of Jesus’s second coming, which will be fulfilled in the fullness of time. Milton juxtaposes the Christians who had God’s revelation and yet are impatient for Jesus’s return with Mary, who patiently awaits God’s revelation, in order to contrast their degrees of faith. Likewise, he juxtaposes Mary’s holy and patient suffering with Satanic frustration to emphasize the former contrast. An inversion of his confident speech in Paradise Lost, Satan reports to his demonic council that a Son of God walks among them whose patience will try his own. Still, he doubts whether this Son of God be the Son of God prophesied to throw Satan and the rebel angels once more down to hell. Satan’s persistence to try this man by other means, even in the face of all the evidence that he is dealing with Jesus, reveals his lack of faith in Scriptural prophesy and corrupted sense of kairotic propriety. Satan’s doubt that he is in fact dealing with the Son of God
will again lead him into the errors of temptation—both self-deceit and a desire to deceive Jesus—and toward his second fall. Satan weighs his Adversary, but weighs him against himself and his former success against Adam, the first of two rhetorical improprieties:

such an Enemy

Is ris’n to invade us, who no less

Threat’ns than our expulsion down to Hell.

I, as I undertook, and with the vote

Consenting in full frequence was empow’r’d,

Have found him, view’d him, tasted him, but find

Far other labor to be undergone

Than when I dealt with Adam first of Men. (2.126-33)

Satan realizes that he is outmatched in this verbal battle, for Jesus possesses an “amplitude of mind” (1.139) that Satan cannot hope to reach in his discourse. Jesus’s sense of rhetorical propriety, which is a function of his right reason, reveals that Jesus has been “With more than human gifts from Heav’n adorn’d” (2.137). Satan thus requests the counsel of his fellow rebel angels, whose advice he ironically scorns in large part because in it he recognizes his own impropriety. Satan rebukes Belial for advising that Jesus be tempted with the “daughters of men…the fairest found” (2.154). Strangely, Satan immediately sees the impropriety of Belial’s counsel, even as he cannot recognize his own, his hypocrisy serving as Satan’s second rhetorical impropriety and Milton’s illustration of the degree of Satan’s self-delusion:
Belial, in much uneven scale thou weigh’st

All others by thyself; because of old

Thou thyself dot’st on womankind, admiring

Thir shape, thir color, and attractive grace,

None are, thou think’st, but taken with such toys. (2.173-77)

Satan opts to tempt Jesus by a different kind of bodily hunger than the one Belial recommends, even though Satan has already urged Jesus in their first discourse to turn the stones to bread to satiate his hunger. Jesus replies to Satan’s second temptation in much the same way as he did to his first: “Man lives not by Bread only, but each Word / Proceeding from the mouth of God” (1.349-50). Jesus’s reply reminds Satan of his loss of rhetorical propriety, a result of Satan’s disbelief in the Scriptures’ authority embodied in Jesus himself.

During his second temptation, when Satan meets Jesus after having fasted a full forty days in the desert, Jesus resounds his obedience to the Word of God as God’s will for humanity. Satan contrasts the spread he conjures to tempt Jesus with the “forbidden fruit” by which humanity fell from grace, and in an interesting rhetorical move, turns his own doubts about Jesus being the Word’s “embodiment” and Jesus’s body becoming the “bread of life” upon Jesus himself:

What doubts the Son of God to sit and eat?

These are not Fruits forbidden; no interdict

Defends the touching of these viands pure;
Thir taste no knowledge works, at least of evil,

But life preserves, destroys life’s enemy,

Hunger, with sweet restorative delight.

. . .

What doubt’st thou Son of God? (2.368-73; 77)

Jesus’s reply focuses directly on Satan’s reference to God’s “interdict,” for the Word and Will of God are one and the same. Jesus’s sense of rhetorical propriety, suiting his words to each of Satan’s arguments, is also underwritten by a plain appeal to his economic propriety as God’s incarnate Authority, Word, and Will. Jesus therefore replies,

Said’st thou not that to all things I had right?

And who withholds my pow’r that right to use?

Shall I receive by gift what of my own,

When and where likes me best, I can command?

I can at will, doubt not, as soon as thou,

Command a Table in this Wilderness

. . .

Thy pompous Delicacies I contemn,

And count thy specious gifts no gifts but guiles. (2.379-84; 390-91)
Jesus appeals to his right, power, and possession, all of which will be revealed in the fullness of time. Jesus’s economic propriety has been “underwritten” by the Authority of Scriptural prophesy—the Word of God—and though he can at His Will “Command a Table in this Wilderness,” he patiently and obediently restrains his will by his sense of kairotic propriety, “hung’ring more to do [his] Father’s will” (2.259). That Jesus refers to Satan’s gifts as “specious” also signifies Satan’s severely degraded capacity for right reasoning, which is precisely what leads to his debasement: “To know,” says Jesus, “and knowing worship God aright . . . this attracts the Soul, / Governs the inner man, the nobler part; / That other o’er the body only reigns” (2.475-78). Milton thus closes Book II treating the doctrine of right reason as “knowing and worshiping God aright.” Milton emphasizes the propriety of this reasoning capacity, not merely in one’s “knowing God aright,” but also in suggesting that by virtue of this reasoning capacity, one is drawn into closer proximity to God—for, indeed, “this [knowing] attracts the Soul” and returns to God in worship that which is already His: man’s “nobler part.”

Satan fails to tempt Jesus on each occasion he meets him, for he cannot find the rhetorical of propriety necessary to lead Jesus into temptation. As in Paradise Lost, Milton likens each of these verbal confrontations to battle in a larger spiritual war. Jesus repels each of Satan’s assaults, and each time Satan fails, he is left “mute confounded what to say, / What to reply, confuted and convinc’t / Of his weak arguing and fallacious drift” (3.2-4). Milton shows that Jesus repels each of Satan’s assaults using that portion of right reason given him by God, whose Authority passes directly to Jesus in the form of Scriptural Authority and finds its expression in the exercise of perfect rhetorical propriety. Satan admits that Jesus’s sense of rhetorical propriety reveals all the more to Satan that his own sense of propriety fails him, for his chosen distance from God’s light—hell being the place expressly desired of Satan, where “fardest from [God] is best” (1.247)—leaves him unable to exercise his former gift of right reason, so that he himself
continually wanders self-deluded into error and temptation. Satan’s rhetorical failures result from a failure of logic, which Jesus’s perfect logical and rhetorical propriety prove when Jesus’s rhetoric leaves Satan standing both “mute” and “confounded” as a result “Of his weak arguing and fallacious drift.” Milton understands Jesus’s argumentative strategies as “military tactics” whose power results from his perfect sense of propriety, which Satan likens to military might:

I see thou know’st what is of use to know,

What best to say canst say, to do canst do;

Thy actions to thy words accord, thy words

To thy large heart give utterance due, thy heart

Contains of good, wise, just, the perfect shape.

. . . . wert thou sought to deeds

That might require th’ array of war, thy skill

Of conduct would be such, that all the world

Could not sustain thy Prowess, or subsist

In battle, though against thy few in arms. (3.7-11; 16-20)

Satan praises Jesus’s sense of propriety as the ancient Greeks praised the virtues of to prepon or rhetorical propriety. The Greeks had developed their understanding of rhetorical ethos from their drawing a likeness between men’s speech and action, for they found men’s speech as a form of action that reveals men’s inner life and character. Satan realizes that Jesus’s apt words and
actions, or rather the unity of Jesus’s words and actions, express the “perfect shape” of Jesus’s soul.\footnote{See Chapter 1, “Rhetorical Propriety in Augustine’s On Christian Doctrine, for a discussion of Augustine’s basis of rhetorical propriety in proportional logic, a logic he developed from his early writings on aesthetics to his later writings on Christian ethics and mortality. Augustine argued that symmetry, harmony, and unity are expressions of the supremely good and rational mind of God, and that disproportion, discord, and division are evidence of a mind corrupted by vice and wickedness.}

That Satan likens Jesus’s verbal virtuosity to military prowess further reinforces his misperception of Jesus’s rhetorical gifts, for Satan then uses his praise of Jesus’s reasoning and rhetoric to tempt him to conquer the world by his words. By so doing, Satan attempts to subvert, or rather invert, God’s Will to “send [Jesus] forth” to undertake “his great warfare” and “conquer Sin and Death the two grand foes” (1.158-59), as well as twist the true intention of Jesus’s words, “By winning words to conquer willing hearts, / And make persuasion do the work of fear” (1.222-23). Satan’s attempt to tempt Jesus to military conquest Jesus rebuffs by once more turning to Scripture and likening his own spiritual condition to Job’s, which at once recalls Satan’s subservience to God’s sovereignty, God granting Satan permission to try Job’s patience and obedience to God.\footnote{Several commentators have noted structural parallels between Milton’s Paradise Regained and the Book of Job, first among them Barbara Lewalski in Milton’s Brief Epic. Lewalski observes that although Milton uses “martial imagery . . . to describe Jesus, and although he is engaged in a transformed epic duel, he belongs in the category of the patient and suffering heroes—Jesuss, Magdalens, Adams, Susannas, Josephs, Jobs” (107). Lewalski argues that Milton would have been familiar with two hermeneutical traditions concerning Job, both of which interpret Job as a type for Jesus’s suffering, but draw very different conclusions about Job’s character—and Jesus’s character, by extension. The first, more conservative reading, at least by Protestant standards, focuses on Job’s frailty in the central dialogues, which foreshadows Jesus’s suffering. This reading, says Lewalski, is key to reader’s exegesis of Milton’s epic. The second reading focuses on the frame story of the Book of Job and Job’s heroic and epic struggle with the Adversary. Mary Anne Radzinowicz suggests in Towards “Samson Agonistes”: The Growth of Milton’s Mind that Milton fell somewhere between the first and second typological readings Lewalski offers. Radzinowicz argues, for instance, that Milton “read the Book of Job as declaring truths about the nature of God which in their effects upon men could lead to growth in virtue” (259), but only after men’s insufficient knowledge of the nature of their relationship to God had been revised. For Milton, continues Radzinowicz, this act of revision requires a more complete iconoclasm than the faithful person has} Jesus draws several Scriptural likenesses to re-appropriate Satan’s argument that “glory” is found by military conquest:
They err who count it glorious to subdue
By Conquest far and wide . . . .
But if there be in glory aught of good,
It may by means far different be attain’d,
Without ambition, war, or violence;
By deeds of peace, by wisdom eminent,
By patience, temperance; I mention still

undergone heretofore, a period of trial during which the image-holder is made to suffer: “the function of the Book of Job as Milton read it was to shatter the ‘mistaken . . . doctrine’ or false orthodoxy of its protagonist without shattering his faith, that is, to replace his inherited theology or implicit faith with an understanding and truer faith that can equip him for the realities of mortal life” (253). Victoria Kahn contends in her essay “Job’s Complaint in Paradise Regained,” on the other hand, that Milton’s reading of Job was more radical than the one Radzinowicz offers. Kahn follows earlier critics’ observations that the Book of Job offers a model for Milton’s Jesus in Paradise Regained, but Kahn is less interested in the “patient and subservient Job other critics have emphasized” than in the “vehement and ironic Job of the central dialogue,” whose “rhetorical strategies—quotation, mimicry, irony, parody, and playing with the dual meaning of a single word,” are “at least as important a model for Milton’s Jesus” as this other one critics have tended to offer (633). In many respects Kahn follows Northrop Frye’s description of “the Son’s Jobean rhetoric” in his chapter, “Revolt in the Desert,” in The Return to Eden. In this chapter, Frye notes striking differences between the “dialectical colloquies” Milton uses to structure his epic and those deployed in the dialogues of Plato, Boethius, and the Book of Job. The “dialectical colloquies” of Milton’s precursors, Frye observes, “usually either incorporate one argument into another dialectically or build up two different cases rhetorically; Milton’s feat of constructing a double argument from the same words, each highly plausible and yet as different as light from darkness, is, so far as I know, unique to English literature” (135-36). Frye examines the Son’s “distinctive rhetoric” as an index of the Son’s dual nature. Kahn, however, understands the Son’s rhetoric as an index of the paradox of the Son’s dual nature: “To be a ‘perfect man,’” writes Kahn, “is to be a perfectly human reader of scripture, one whose questions can serve as a model for any human reader. But to be a ‘perfect man’ is also to be an incarnate God, one who will suffer on the cross to save mankind” (627). Kahn emphasizes the “subversive implications” of the Son’s dual readings of Scripture as not merely, in agreement with Frye, the Son’s agonistic questioning of Satanic rhetoric, which is a rhetoric of duplicity, but also the Son’s “vehement questioning” of God’s justice. In raising questions about God’s justice, the Son does not simply parody Satan, but legitimizes Job’s complaint. Kahn concludes that the Son’s ironical rhetoric in Paradise Lost amounts to “a Christian version of Job’s complaint,” which serves as a condition of the poet’s work in that Milton parodies in Jesus’s apparent patience “the false comforts of the Restoration,” thereby encouraging his readers to silent political resistance by “defend[ing] the saeculum, the space of time between the Incarnation and the Second Coming that dictates the separation of church and state, and the patient anticipation of the right occasion for political action” (627).
Him whom thy wrongs with Saintly patience borne,

Made famous in a Land and times obscure;

Who names not now with honor patient Job?

. . . .

Shall I seek glory then, as vain men seek

Oft not deserv’d? I seek not mine, but his

Who sent me, and thereby witness whence I am. (3.71-72; 88-95; 105-07)

Coupled with his reference to “patient Job,” which reminds Satan of his failures as man and God’s Adversary, Jesus closes his response to Satan’s temptation with the name of God: “I am,” an echo of the Book of Exodus. Jesus’s words repeat the Exodus passage in which God calls Moses to lead Israel out of their Egyptian bondage into the wilderness, so that after a 40-year period of wandering the desert, with many trials of faith, patience, and obedience, they might at long last find the promised land of Canaan. The typological reference is subtle, but rhetorically appropriate, given that Jesus presently meets his own trials and temptations during his 40-day trek through the wilderness. As Moses’s antitype, Jesus anticipates his recovery of paradise and his leading by both his ministry and example the Christians who choose to follow him to this “promised land.” Underwriting the typological reference’s rhetorical appropriateness is Jesus’s appeal to economic propriety—that he seeks not his own glory, as Satan himself did and as Satan presently encourages Jesus to do, but rather the glory of God, who sends Jesus into the wilderness to ready him for the world. The last line of Jesus’s response, if read without enjambment, reveals that which is divine in him: “thereby witness whence I am.” By realizing God’s Will and
fulfilling God’s Word in and through the Scriptures, Jesus procures not merely God’s glory but his own.

Because it is Satan’s aspiration to seek his own glory and not God’s, he persists on this faulty argumentative train and line of reasoning, cautioning Jesus to “Think no[t] so slight of glory [for God]…seeks glory, / And for his glory all things made” (3.109-11). Yet another impropriety, Satan would capitalize on Jesus’s offering the glory of God as that which is most divine in him, which Satan claims God “exacts” of all creation, even of Satan himself (3.120). As he more plainly argues at the close of the epic, Satan here suggests that he too is the “Son of God.” Jesus again corrects Satan’s faulty reasoning by posing the following rhetorical question:

Of [all rational creation] what could [God] less expect

Than glory and benediction, that is thanks,

The slightest, easiest, readiest recompense

From them who could return him nothing else,

And not returning that would likeliest render

Contempt instead, dishonor, obloquy?

Hard recompense, unsuitable return

For so much good, so much beneficence. (3.127-33)

The rhetorical question Jesus poses Satan reveals Satan’s want of right reasoning; for, by it, Jesus silences Satan and justifies God’s economic propriety over all creation. That God requires “benediction” for his “beneficence” Jesus argues is perfectly appropriate since God created
heaven and earth and all rational beings therein by the goodness of his Word. The stylistic propriety of Jesus’s wordplay—“bene-diction” for “bene-faction”—not only shows that it is godly for saying (i.e. “diction”) and making (i.e. “faction”) to amount to the same thing, but also that the spiritual contract between man and God gets realized through man’s exercise of right reason in expressions of rhetorical propriety. Jesus offers a simple reason for his conflation of rhetorical and economic propriety: “And reason; since his word all things produc’d” (3.122). Jesus closes this discourse revealing Satan’s error through man’s error:

But why should man seek glory? who of his own

Hath nothing, and to whom nothing belongs . . . ?

. . .

Yet, sacrilegious, to himself would take

That which to God alone of right belongs;

Yet so much bounty is in God, such grace,

That who advance his glory, not thir own,

Them he to himself glory will advance. (3.134-35; 140-44)

Jesus juxtaposes Satan and man’s “theft” of the glory that rightly belongs to God with his own glorification of God to reveal once more to Satan the degraded state into which his and man’s formerly right reasoning has fallen. By appropriating what has always been God’s, Satan and man commit economic improprieties; by seeking glory for themselves, as if they might earn any glory outside of God’s grace, Satan and man commit rhetorical improprieties. Again, Satan is silenced
by Jesus’s impeccable (i.e. sinless) logic: “Satan had not to answer, but stood struck / With guilt of his own sin, for he himself / Insatiable of glory had lost all” (3.146-48).146

Satan anticipates the eternally prophesied revelation of God’s Word in this single moment, for in this moment, Satan sees the impropriety of his words and actions as the cause and consequence of his fall from God’s grace. Satan recalls the prophesy of Jesus’s reign in heaven and on earth, which will end his own reign on earth. Satan next assault, therefore, is to question the kairotic propriety of Jesus’s reign, ironically encouraging Jesus to seize the crown before the moment prophesied in the Scriptures. This appeal and similar appeals in Book IV are ironic in that Satan ushers in his own final destruction and eternal damnation by speeding up Jesus’s rightful reign over heaven and earth. Implied in Satan’s appeal is a desire for damnation, a return to the right or proper judgment that he knows will meet him at the final judgment. Satan “reasons” thus with Jesus:

If Kingdom move thee not, let move thee Zeal

And Duty; Zeal and Duty are not slow,

146 At several crucial doctrinal moments in the epic, Jesus’s words move Satan to silence. Compared to Jesus’s calm, contemplative silences, Satan’s silences leave him either confounded or in awe of Christ’s words. Several critics interpret silence in the epic as the sublime experience of divinity, especially in the pinnacle scene that concludes the epic’s argument. Stanley Fish argues in “Inaction and Silence,” for instance, that in the pinnacle scene “speech finds its apex in silence,” whereby silence becomes “an emblem of nonexistence” (42). Fish suggests that at this moment Satan recognizes the essence of God the Father in the Son, a unification of Jesus’s humanity with his Father’s divinity. Steven Goldsmith contends in “The Muting of Satan: Language and Redemption in Paradise Regained,” on the other hand, that Jesus’s silencing of Satan throughout the temptation drama readies him for his ministry of the Word and silencing of wicked rhetoric. Ken Simpson reconciles Fish and Goldsmith’s readings of silence in “Lingering Voices, Telling Silences: Silence and the Word in Paradise Regained,” revising Fish’s conception of divine essence to claim instead that in pinnacle scene Jesus realizes his Father’s divine Will as articulated in the Word, which silences Satan and leaves Jesus with nothing more to say, and revising Goldsmith’s view that silence and the Word (Jesus’s words) are antithetical. In fact, Simpson argues,

The silencing of Satan and the silence of Jesus on the pinnacle are two completely different events: the first reveals the emptiness of words not linked to the Word; the second reveals the saving power of the Word as well as the inability of words to represent God’s presence. (180) Milton’s use of “sublime silences” in the poem, says Simpson, invite readers of the epic to contemplate the mysteries of incarnation, “Christ-Jesus’s” dual identity as “God-man.”
But on Occasion’s forelock watchful wait.

They themselves rather are occasion best,

Zeal of thy Father’s house, Duty to free

Thy Country from her Heathen servitude;

So shalt thou best fullfil, best verify

The Prophets old, who sung thy endless reign,

The happier reign the sooner it begins.

Reign then; what canst thou better do the while? (3.171-80)

Satan urges Jesus to fulfill himself the prophesies of his rule, the present occasion being the best occasion since the sooner his reign begins the better. Again, Satan presumes to know as God knows that he might move Jesus to sin against God’s sense of what is timely. Jesus reminds Satan of the kairotic propriety of God’s Will and Word in “Holy Writ” revealed:

All things are best fulfill’d in their due time,

And time there is for all things, Truth hath said:

If of my reign Prophetic Write hath told

That it shall never end, so when begin

The Father in his purpose hath decreed,

He in whose hand all times and seasons roll. (3.182-87)
Jesus’s words are an echo Ecclesiastes 3:1, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.” As above, so below. Jesus’s demonstrates his faith in the Word of God and his patience during and obedience to the unfolding of God’s Providential designs. Jesus’s argument that “things are best fulfill’d in their due time” anticipates his entering into his ministry, but only after he suffers trials in the wilderness. Readers of Paradise Regained recall the words of Jesus’s ministry, recorded in the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, in which Jesus urges his disciples to observe kairotic propriety in their thoughts, words, and actions by first observing the rhetorical propriety of God’s eternal decree, and the power that backs it as a result of God’s economic propriety. As recorded in Acts 1:7, for instance, Jesus said to his disciples, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.”

Milton closes Book III with yet another of Jesus’s appeals to kairotic propriety, this time in response to Satan’s challenge to Jesus’s power to take his proper place as David’s heir and realize God’s Kingdom on earth in the kingdom of Israel. Satan offers Jesus the earth’s greatest kingdoms to rule so that, by ruling them, he might attain the courtly wisdom and rhetoric necessary to rule rightly the kingdom of Israel. Satan argues that it is by “Monarchs, and thir radiant Courts, / Best school of best experience” (3.237-38) that Jesus will learn how to rule.

Jesus repeats this same appeal to kairotic propriety in Book IV when he replies to Satan’s gift of the most glorious kingdoms of the world,

Know therefore when my season comes to sit
On David’s Throne, it shall be like a tree
Spreading and overshadowing all the Earth,
Or as a stone that shall to pieces dash
All Monarchies besides throughout the world,
And of my Kingdom there shall be no end:
Means there shall be to this, but what the means,
Is not for thee to know, nor me to tell. (4.146-53)

Jesus’s reference to his rule as “a stone that shall to pieces dash / All Monarchies besides throughout the world” (4.149-50) Satan alludes to in Book IV when he concludes that Jesus’s obedience is “as a rock / Of Adamant” (4.533-34). Jesus also cautions Satan once more in this passage that to persuade the Son of God to preempt God’s Kingdom before the proper time is to presume to know God’s mind. Satan’s blasphemy becomes plainer as he reveals more of his intent, and therefore more of his inner life and true character, to Jesus in Book IV.
rightly. Jesus has already anticipated Satan’s line of faulty reasoning, however, by offering well before Satan’s argument an inverted rhetoric that becomes Jesus’s ministry and one of the hallmarks of Christian wisdom: “who best / Can suffer, best can do; best reign, who first / Well hath obey’d” (3.194-96). Jesus’s patient suffering and obedience prepare him for his earthly and heavenly reign, but even more significant is that Jesus moves Satan once more to silence at the close of Book III, again aligning his rhetoric of propriety with economic and kairotic propriety.

After showing Jesus the world’s empires, Satan shows Jesus the substance of their strength, which is in their military might. Satan positions Jesus to “Choose . . . [either] by conquest or league” (3.370) which empire—Parthian (i.e. Persian) or Roman—he would take by force or join forces with to “regain…David’s royal seat, his true Successor” (3.373). Without the support of these empires, says Satan, Jesus has little hope of reigning over Israel. Jesus returns to his faith in Scriptural prophesies, however, and again reminds Satan of kairotic propriety, which in the fullness of time will restore the sense of economic propriety Satan and humanity lost in their fall from grace:

Means I must use thou say’st, prediction else

Will unpredict and fail me of the Throne:

My time I told thee (and that time for thee

Were better farthest off) is not yet come . . . . (3.394-97)

Jesus repeats the words Satan sounds in the hell of Paradise Lost: “must [we] change for Heav’n, this mournful gloom / For that celestial light? Be it so . . . . fardest from him is best” (1.245-47). Jesus recalls Satan’s attention to his spatial distance from God, which Jesus observes in Satan’s faulty, because faithless, reasoning capacity. Only the faithless would preempt God’s prediction
and, as Jesus argues, Satan’s persistence is peculiar to the point of perversity inasmuch as Jesus’s ascension signals Satan’s doom. Jesus thus concludes his speech and Book III once more proving his fidelity to the kairotic propriety inherent in God’s Word and eternal decree: “To his due time and providence I leave [my ascension]” (3.440).

Milton closes Book III with Satan’s silent defeat in the wake of Jesus’s speech, which “to the Fiend / Made answer meet” (3.441-42). Having lost his capacity for right reason, Satan cannot hope to meet Jesus’s “answer meet”—Jesus’s perfect sense of rhetorical propriety—with “meet answer” of his own. Milton opens Book IV with Satan, standing “Perplex’d and troubl’d” that he “beforehand had no better weigh’d / The [rhetorical] strength he was to cope with, or his own” (4.1; 8-9). At the opening of Book IV, then, Milton returns the reader to Satan’s hypocritical rebuke of Belial’s rhetorical impropriety: “in much uneven scale [said Satan] thou [Belial] weigh’st / All others by thyself” (2.173-74). Satan now realizes that which is demonic in him, the “self-deception” (4.7) that moves him to deceive others as if they might be deceived by the same means he deceives himself. Satan’s fallen and faulty reasoning is precisely what invests his discourse with its power to produce illusions, for when he resumes his temptation, Satan calls before himself and Jesus a vision of Rome, which even Milton finds peculiar: “By what strange Parallax or Optic skill / Of vision multiplied through air, or glass / Of Telescope, were curious to inquire” (4.40-43). Milton suggests in his use of the word “Parallax” that Satanic discourse derives its power to produce illusions from a radical contextualization of meaning that would render the “truth” contingent upon the speaker’s situation, relative to his point of view toward the object of his perception. Satanic discourse would make rhetorical propriety contingent upon Satan’s own rhetorical situation, not transferrable from rhetorical situation to rhetorical
situation.\textsuperscript{148} Doing so removes the rigor of words, which, Jesus time and again shows in \textit{Paradise Regained}, loosens words from the Will and Word of God that gives them life and meaning. Milton illustrates in \textit{Paradise Lost} and \textit{Paradise Regained} that the question of “rigor” is really a question of “scope”—the sphere of life and activity that God has assigned to all creation. Rational beings’ sense of propriety is therefore contingent upon their faithful, patient, and obedient observance of the work that they are called by God to perform in the world.

Throughout his temptation in \textit{Paradise Regained}, Jesus maintains a clear sense of rhetorical propriety that is wedded to the Will and Word of God, whereby he appropriately weighs Satanic rhetoric and the gifts Satan offers him by it. Satan finally grows frustrated in Book IV when all his offers Jesus values as little more than air, which is the primary element both Satan and his demonic council inhabit. Satan concludes that Jesus has already “weighed” his Adversary, suggesting that, for all Satan’s deception, Jesus knows what hangs in the balance:

I see [says Satan] all offers made by me how slight

Thou valu’st, because offer’d, and reject’st:

Nothing will please the difficult and nice,

Or nothing more than still to contradict:

On th’other side know also thou, that I

\textsuperscript{148} The question of rhetorical propriety’s “transferability” Stanley Fish refers to as the concept’s “cashability,” an interesting choice of words that connotes “economic propriety” in discursive exchange. Fish skepticism about the applicability of rhetorical propriety as a concept that renders rhetorical situations more meaningful becomes apparent in the logical impasse he reaches concerning the term. Removed from rhetorical situations, Fish argues, rhetorical propriety gets reduced to an ideology. Embedded within rhetorical situations, he continues, rhetorical propriety is meaningless. I treat Fish’s logical impasse in my introduction, “The Rhetoric of Propriety and the Propriety of Rhetoric.” It is of note here that Satanic discourse is “non-transferrable” or “non-cashable,” to borrow a word from Fish, largely because Satan does not observe God’s Word as either underwriting his own words or guiding his sense of what is appropriate in his discursive exchanges with Jesus.
On what I offer set as high esteem,

Nor what I part with mean to give for naught

. . .

On this condition, if thou wilt fall down,

And worship me as thy superior Lord. (4.155-61; 166-67)

Satan suggests that Jesus has used Cicero’s rhetorical tactic *in utremque partem*, or arguing on both sides of the case, that he might tease out the intent of his Adversary’s discourse. The ethical tactic proves necessary given Satan’s deception, for Satan’s rhetorical improprieties render his words useless for speaking his inner life. Already “self-deceiv’d” (4.7), “author to himself in all,” Satan would rewrite or recreate the world as he sees fit and attempt to persuade, or rather delude, others to accept his deception as truth. In his response, Jesus returns to faith and piety in the Word as the only condition of rhetorical propriety:

I never lik’d thy talk, thy offers less,

Now both abhor, since thou hast dar’d to utter

Th’abominable terms, impious condition;

But I endure the time, till which expired,

Thou hast permission on me. It is written

The first of all Commandments, Thou shalt worship

The Lord thy God, and only him shalt serve . . . (4.171-77)
Jesus alludes to the first commandment of the Decalogue as the one condition on which the entirety of the Scriptures as the Will and Word of God rests. Since it is Jesus’s calling to fulfill God’s Word in the flesh, the “terms” of Satan’s condition more directly challenge Jesus’s life in the Word and the sphere of activity prescribed to Jesus in the Scriptures. The violence inherent in Satan’s terms strains Jesus’s patient endurance of his rhetoric, for the plainer Satan appears, the more monstrous he becomes. Jesus meets this degree of impropriety with more forceful rhetoric, a rhetoric that suits his revulsion: “Get thee behind me; plain thou now appear’st / That Evil one, Satan for ever damn’d” (4.193-94). As their discourse becomes “plainer” Satan’s “rhetoric of impropriety” ceases even to be rhetoric, when the violence of his words becomes violence indeed.

Ever more cognizant of his ultimate rhetorical failure, Satan ironically offers Jesus supremacy of skill in the language arts of logic, rhetoric, and poetry, each of which Jesus rebuffs in turn by again appealing to the supremacy of the Scriptures. It is only fitting that Jesus’s own discourse becomes ever more fixated on plain style, to which he appeals to show that right reasoning emanates from the light of God and, much like the nakedness of the Paradise, requires no clothing to hide its true intent; for, ashamed that he made plain his true intent, Satan turns to protean discourse one last time, softening his rhetoric to pacify Jesus’s anger.149 Deploying his

149 Commentators continually debate Milton’s perception and uses of rhetoric. Some commentators, such as Stanley Fish and Thomas Sloane, argue that Milton implicitly rejects rhetorical tradition in Paradise Lost and expressly rejects it Paradise Regained. In his essay “Rhetoric,” Fish argues Milton’s epics register the Restoration’s general distrust of rhetoric as “deceptive” (122-24). Fish slightly revises his argument in How Milton Works, but still suggests that Milton rejects “carnal rhetoric” in Paradise Lost, which in Paradise Regained comes to mean Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition (115-23). Thomas Sloane takes this line of thinking to its logical conclusion, describing Milton’s epics as entirely “unrhetorical” (1) and faults Milton, as well as his contemporaries, for contributing to the “disintegration of humanist rhetoric” (249). J. B. Broadbent and, later, Richard Cooley qualify Milton’s rejection of rhetorical tradition, the former distinguishing the kinds of rhetoric Milton embraces from the ones he censures and the latter contending that Milton’s epic sequence illustrates his developing understanding of a “reformed eloquence . . . stripped of duplicity characteristic of Satan[ic] discourse” (232). Other commentators reach various conclusions about Milton’s rhetorical “plainness,” Irene Samuel describing Milton as a “candid rhetorician,” John Steadman envisioning Milton as the Puritan orator “standing on a hill,” not wandering in mazes lost, James Egan reading in Milton’s epics an “aesthetic of plainness,” Ann Torday Gulden suggesting a “natural
most subtle temptation, Satan attempts to move Jesus without the Scriptures’ prescriptions, offering Gentile learning as “knowledge…not couch’t in Moses’ Law” (4.225), yet no less “led by Nature’s light” (4.228) on that account. Satan appeals directly to what he perceives is Jesus’s “inner life,” saying

And thou thyself [Son of God] seem’st otherwise inclin’d

Than to a worldly Crown, addicted more

To contemplation and profound dispute,

As by that early action may be judg’d,

When slipping from thy Mother’s eye thou went’st

Alone into the Temple; there wast found

Among the gravest Rabbis disputant

On points and questions fitting Moses’ Chair,

plainness” (17), and Debora Shuger a “passionate plainness.” Still other commentators argue that “stylistic plainness” far from characterizes Milton’s rhetoric in the epics. Ian Robinson, for instance, states that while many of Milton’s “individual phrases are . . . strong,” there is “no way of putting them together” (122-23), which gives the impression of “impossible syntactic wandering” (65). Among others, Murray Roston describes Milton’s complicated mixture of styles as “baroque,” and John Hale attempts to unravel this complicated mixture of Biblical, Ciceronian, and Senecan styles in Milton’s Languages. Yet other commentators, such as Wayne Anderson, Ronald Stark, and Thomas Kranidas, argue that in his “dramatization of faith” in his epics, Milton celebrates “those styles infused with vital warmth and vital virtue.” Anderson offers a more sympathetic reading of Milton’s rhetoric than Alan Fisher’s analysis of Jesus’s passionless style in “Why Is Paradise Regained So Cold?” Stark extends Anderson’s argument, concluding that, for Milton, “[s]tyle must have a fire about it . . . a heat born out of religious engagement, and it is the degree of heat, not highness or plainness, that determines Milton’s attitude towards rhetoric” (21). Like Stark, Kranidas describes Milton’s rhetoric as a “rhetoric of zeal.” As these various characterizations of Milton’s “rhetoric” suggest, Milton employs the style that best suits the speaker’s character and the speech’s occasion—its time, place, audience, and circumstances. In short, Milton demonstrates a keen sense of rhetorical propriety in his epics. (I am indebted in this footnote to Ronald Stark’s comprehensive review of the critical literature surrounding Milton’s “rhetoric,” with which he opens his essay “Cold Styles: On Milton’s Critiques of Frigid Rhetoric in Paradise Lost.”)
Teaching not taught: the childhood shows the man,

As morning shows the day. (4.212-21)

Satan ceases to appeal to Jesus’s manhood and begins appealing to his divinity, for he acknowledges his former gifts as merely “transitory,” since they are of the material, not the spiritual world. Satan’s rhetoric anticipates his final, most desperate temptation—his removal of Jesus to the Temple’s pinnacle. But it also recalls Jesus’s own reflections prior to his journey into the wilderness, in which he remembers his Passover visit to the Temple in Jerusalem, “there to hear / The Teachers of our Law, and to propose, / What might improve my knowledge or their own” (1.211-13). Satan’s rhetoric is most impious when it seems most fitting. Satan thus trades on the appearance of propriety, even punning on the word “fitting”—“[Jesus] disputant / On points and questions fitting Moses’ Chair”—to allude at once to Jesus’s assumption of Moses’s authority as teacher of the Law (and the logical and oratorical skill this office entails) as well as to Jesus’s fulfillment of the Law of Moses in his ministry of God’s New Dispensation. Satan here trades on the rhetoric of propriety by utilizing the typological rhetoric of the Scriptures.

Satan thus offers Jesus knowledge of the Greek and Roman language arts that he might better contemplate and dispute the Law, which has been the substance of Jesus’s speech all along. It escapes Satan that Jesus’s speech has from the beginning of their dispute embodied the Law and realized God’s Authority in the Scriptures, of which Jesus again reminds Satan:

Think not but that I know these things; or think

I know them not; not therefore am I short

Of knowing what I ought: he who receives
Light from above, from the fountain of light,

No other doctrine needs . . . (4.286-90)

Jesus reveals to Satan that in his appeal to propriety, Satan’s rhetoric has never appeared more convoluted. Jesus appeals instead to the light of right reason, which emanates directly from the mind of God and requires neither the Gentiles’ rhetoric nor the Gentiles’ logic to give it shape and meaning. Jesus appeals to the “plain sense” of the Scriptures’ logic and the prophets’ “majestic unaffected style . . . [in which] is plainest taught, and easiest learnt, / What Makes a Nation happy, and keeps it so, / What ruins Kingdoms, and lays Cities flat” (4.359; 361-63). Jesus adds that even the Scriptures’ poetry predates the Gentiles’ poetry—“That rather Greece from us these Arts deriv’d” (4.338)—and that the Gentiles’ poetry “Ill imitate[s]” (4.339) the propriety of the Hebrew songs, “to all true tastes excelling, / Where God is prais’d aright, and Godlike men, / The Holiest of Holies, and his Saints; / Such are from God inspir’d” (4.346-50).150 Jesus at once rejects Satan’s understanding of the language arts and reveals once more to Satan the limits of his reason and rhetoric.

Since “all his darts were spent,” Satan “now / Quite at a loss” (4.365-66) returns Jesus from the mount where he tempted him with visions of worldly power to the wilderness where he first met him, concluding that “The Wilderness / For thee is fittest place” (4.371-73). With some measure of God’s light remaining in him still, by which he may be “serviceable” to divine providence, Satan’s words prove prophetic. The “wilderness” is for Jesus the fittest place, for Scripture describes the world into which Jesus will enter to carry out his ministry as a “wilderness.” Although the time of Jesus’s ministry is concealed from Satan, still he prophesies

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150 See Chapter 5, Part 1 “The ‘Contracted Palm’ to the ‘Open Hand’: Milton’s ‘Marital Muse’ Reconsidered” for a fuller treatment of the place and propriety Milton accords the “organic arts” of logic, rhetoric and poetry in the reformed curriculum he outlines in Of Education.
that “Sorrows, and labors, opposition, hate . . . scorns, reproaches, injuries, / Violence and stripes, and lastly cruel death” (4.386-88) attend Jesus’s ministry in fulfillment of the Scriptures. Satan concludes that such a life little befits the Son of God who has been prophesied to inherit God’s heavenly kingdom, “A Kingdom [the prophets] portend thee, but what Kingdom, / Real or Allegoric I discern not” (4.389-90). Satan is still permitted some measure of kairotic propriety, but the right reason and sense of rhetorical propriety required to understand the Christian inversion at the heart of Christian ethics eludes him. Satan measures Jesus’s future kingdom by his worldly conception of what befits a king, and so he is rendered deaf to the message of the Gospels and Jesus’s ministry: “the last will be first, and the first will be last.” Since “all his darts [are] spent,” Satan rains thunder and lightning down upon Jesus’s head, which he intends to use as an omen to prophesy the humiliation, suffering, and painful death that lay before Jesus. Again, Satan appeals to kairotic propriety and again he misreads the truth of Jesus’s role in divine providence:

   Thou shalt be what thou art ordain’d, no doubt;

   For Angels have proclaim’d it, but concealing

   The time and means: each act is rightliest done,

   Not when it must, but when it may be best.

   If thou observe not this, be sure to find,

   What I foretold thee, many a hard assay

   Of dangers, and adversities and pains,

   Ere thou of Israel’s Scepter get fast hold;
Whereof this ominous night that clos’d thee round,

So many terrors, voices, prodigies

May warn thee, as a sure foregoing sign. (4.473-83)

Satan reveals to Jesus what Jesus already knew at his baptism when he received the Authority of God in fulfillment of the Scriptures. Satan’s appeal to the Scriptures’ rhetorical propriety—“Thou shalt be what thou art ordain’d, no doubt”—possesses merely the appearance of rhetorical propriety, for Satan later ascribes to himself—“observe . . . What I foretold thee”—the gift of prophesy granted the Old Testament prophets whom God foretold of Jesus’s coming into the world. Satan’s sense of rhetorical propriety is his own creation, much like the storm he interprets as a sign of Jesus’s future suffering. Satan challenges God’s rhetorical propriety in the Word when he assumes the place of prophet; he challenges the Scriptures’ kairotic propriety when he revises prophesies of Jesus as the expressed Will of God fulfilled in the fullness of time, arguing instead that “each act is rightliest done, / Not when it must, but when it may be best.”

Satan’s corruption of rhetorical and kairotic propriety share the same source, in Satan’s self-delusion that he keeps his former relation to God. His delusion is that “relation stands,” even though he has fallen. In his anger and frustration at meeting the true Son of God, Satan loses all semblance of right reason and the rhetoric of propriety that is its expression. Satan declares that it was only after Jesus’s baptism that he considered Jesus

worth my nearer view

And narrower Scrutiny, that I might learn

In what degree or meaning thou art call’d
The Son of God, which bears no single sense;

The Son of God I also am, or was,

And if I was, I am; relation stands;

All men are Sons of God . . .

Satan’s discourse inverts Jesus’s earlier allusion to the Book of Exodus, which was Jesus’s warning to Satan that he would soon witness God’s coming glory, the divinity that will be revealed in Jesus as the appropriate time. Satan bends Jesus’s rhetoric, which is Scriptural rhetoric—“I seek not [my glory], but his / Who sent me, and thereby witness whence I am”—

151 Donald L. Guss argues in his essay “A Brief Epic: ‘Paradise Regained,’” for instance, that Milton’s poetics in Paradise Regained inverts classical epic conventions, such as “chivalric episodes, extended flashbacks, and elaborates speeches” in grand style, and achieves a spare aesthetic in imitation of Biblical rhetoric (237). As his title suggests, Guss observes Milton’s patterning of his epic on the Book of Job, but more than simply Christianizing this brief Hebrew epic, which suggests Milton’s investment in the Scriptures’ typological rhetoric, Milton also develops a sense of poetical decorum that is strikingly similar to Augustine’s examination of the rhetoric and aesthetics of the Scriptures. Coupled with his typological readings of Scripture, Milton’s poetics achieves the “rhetorical hermeneutics” that Augustine outlines in On Christian Doctrine. Milton reads Scripture itself “as a narrative, with [as he outlines in his own On Christian Doctrine] an ‘examination of the context; care in distinguishing between literal and figurative expressions; consideration of cause and circumstance, of antecedents and consequents’” (234). The “historical” hermeneutic Guss finds at work in Milton’s poetics in Paradise Lost fixes Biblical discourse in its special circumstances or rhetorical situation. Thus, Guss concludes, “To imitate [Milton’s] method is to ask what Jesus meant by [any of] his speech[es], considering [it] (in terms traditional to both rhetoric and hermeneutics) time, place, audience, antecedents, and motive” (234). Guss here suggests, but does not analyze at any length, the “rhetoric of propriety” at the heart of Milton’s poetics, a poetics that appears to follow the sense of propriety at the heart of Augustine’s “rhetorical hermeneutics” in On Christian Doctrine.

Guss extends Louis Martz’s argument in “Paradise Regained: The Meditative Combat.” Martz historically situates critical reception of Paradise Regained, saying at the opening of his essay that Milton’s epic had been “in trouble with the critics from the outset.” Martz cites, for example, the critical estimation of Edward Phillips, Milton’s nephew, which Martz says is indicative of seventeenth-century readers’ broader opinion of the quality of Paradise Regained. Phillips admits that the poem was ‘generally censur’d to be much inferior to’ Paradise Lost; though [Phillips] notes that the poet ‘could not hear with patience any such thing when related to him.’ ‘Possibly,’ the nephew adds, ‘the Subject may not afford such variety of Invention, but it is thought by the most judicious to be little or nothing inferior to the other for stile and decorum.” (223)
so that Jesus is no longer the Son of God, but rather a son of God, much like Satan himself is. Satan would stretch the degree of divine light imparted to him, even after the fall, so that it reflects the degree of divinity imparted to Jesus. Satan would appeal to that which is unchanging in him, but which he desires to get farthest from, the light of reason being sharpest when one is closest to God. His relational logic—“relation stands”—carries little Scriptural authority after Satan fell from grace: “The Son of God I also am, or was, / And if was, I am.” Satan’s distance from God renders his relational logic faulty, for he confuses the eternal “I am,” which is the name

Martz demonstrates, however, that the question of literary decorum and stylistic propriety that most troubled Milton’s contemporary readers and still troubles readers today largely stems from Milton’s drawing on the structural and stylistic conventions of various literary genres traditionally kept separate to maintain fidelity to classical forms. Milton mixes forms and styles found in classical pastoral and epic poetry, classical drama, and literary genres of the Bible—psalm, proverb, prophesy, among others. Even as Milton draws on several literary genres in his composition of the epic, Martz argues that the epic is above all a “meditative poem” on the life of Jesus, later become Christ. Martz notes that Milton uses the phrase “Son of God” no fewer than 39 times, which recalls the relationship between “the Son” and “God the Father” in Paradise Lost. Milton elsewhere refers to his epic hero as “Jesus” 6 times, “Savior” 21 times, and “Messiah” 7 times, from which Martz concludes that not only does Milton never refer to Jesus as “Christ,” but also Milton’s careful avoidance of the name reveals the crux of his narrative:

Milton is “not writing about the life of Christ, that unique being, Prophet, Priest, and King: he is writing about a composite generalized being whom he calls the Son of God in such an insistent way as to recall the opening of John’s Gospel: “But as many as received him, to them he gave he power to become the sons God” (1.12); or the promise of Paul in Romans 8.14: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” Or, best of all, the words of John’s first Epistle (3.1-3): “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” (231)

Martz thus shows that it is the purpose of his epic hero neither to enter into conquest upon foreign lands nor conquer foreign peoples, but rather to conquer the demonic force that would draw him away from and corrupt his knowledge of God the Father. Jesus’s style is “subdued” because it is inwardly directed and “unaffected” because it calmly reflects Jesus’s meditations on his knowledge in and through the Scriptures. The epic poem’s most dramatic point is Jesus’s position on the Temple’s “pinnacle,” where he meets Satan’s final temptation—Satan’s urging Jesus to call upon angels of the Lord to rescue him from these dangerous heights—with God’s real presence in the Word and Jesus and Satan, in the words of John’s first Epistle, “see him as he is.”
of God, with the change his disobedience has wrought in him: “Son of God I . . . am, or was.”

Satan invokes the eternal name of God to challenge Jesus’s divinity:

> . . . yet thee I thought

> In some respect far higher so declar’d.

> Therefore I watch’d thy footsteps from that hour [of your baptism],

> And follow’d thee still on to this waste wild,

> Where by all best conjectures I collect

> Thou art to be my fatal enemy.

> Good reason then, if I beforehand seek

> To understand my Adversary, who

> And what he is; his wisdom, power, intent,

> By parle, or composition, truce, or league

> To win him, or win from him what I can. (4.514-30)

That Satan esteemed Jesus so little prior to his baptism—“yet in private bred” (4.509)—reveals Satan’s willful ignorance to Jesus’s place as the Son of God. Satan does not merely loosen what it means to be the Son of God, not a Son of God, again testing the boundaries of rhetorical propriety by becoming “author to himself,” his words reveal that although he was in no position to “sift” his Adversary prior to Jesus’s baptism, still he doubts whether Jesus is the Son of God even after he “by voice from Heav’n / Heard [Jesus] pronounc’d the Son of God beloved” (4.512-13).
Satan’s willful ignorance knows no bounds, for he ignores his former praise of the Jesus child’s precocious gifts as “disputant [among the learned Rabbis] / On points and questions fitting Moses’ Chair, / Teaching not taught: the childhood shows the man, / As morning shows the day” (4.218-21). Satan already admitted, albeit to endear himself to Jesus, that even as a child was Jesus “fitted” for Moses’s Chair. He also ignores all the signs of divinity he has discovered by sifting Jesus in the wilderness, all the trials and temptations that prove, as the Scriptures have foretold, that Jesus is “against all temptation as a rock / Of Adamant, and as a Center, firm” (4.533-34).152 As related in 1 Peter 2:8, Jesus becomes “[a] stone that makes [Satan] stumble…[a] rock that makes [him] fall.” Satan stumbles because doubts Jesus’s divinity; he falls when he realizes he has tempted the Lord God Himself in the flesh.

Frustrated from his rhetorical failures, Satan leaves off his weighing of Jesus “To understand [his] Adversary, who / And what he is.” Because Satan measures Jesus’s capacity for right reason by his own, the Ciceronian ethical-rhetorical tactic in utremque partem, or arguing on both sides of the case, fails Satan on each occasion he applies it. In doubting Jesus’s divinity to the end, Satan proves himself unable to understand the Christian inversion that informs Christian ethics. Satan takes violent action on that account:

Therefore to know what more thou art than man,

Worth naming Son of God by voice from Heav’n,

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152 1 Corinthians 10:4, “they...drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Jesus,” echoes Isaiah 48:21, “They did not thirst when he led them through the deserts; he made water flow for them from the rock; he split the rock and water gushed out.” See also 2 Samuel 22:47, “The Lord lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God, the Rock, my Savior!”; Psalm 18:2, “The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge”; Matthew 16:18, “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church”; Romans 9:33 “As it is written: ‘See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame’; and 1 Peter 2:8, “‘A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.’ They stumble because they disobey the message . . .”
Another method I must now begin.

So saying he caught [Jesus] up . . . . (4.538-41)

Satan bears Jesus from the wilderness to the temple mount in Jerusalem, setting him down on the Temple’s “highest Pinnacle” and saying “There stand, if thou wilt stand; to stand upright / Will ask thee skill” (4.549; 551-52). Satan quotes Scripture, but he corrupts its meaning to meet his already fraudulent reasoning and deceptive rhetorical ends:

I to thy Father’s house

Have brought thee, and highest plac’t, highest is best,

Now show thy Progeny; if not to stand,

Cast thyself down; safely if Son of God:

For it is written, He will give command

Concerning thee to his Angels, in thir hands

They shall up lift thee, lest at any time

Thou chance to dash thy foot against a stone. (4.552-59)

Satan unwittingly recalls his reference to Jesus as a “rock / Of Adamant” upon which his “Progeny” will build the Christian church, the rock that will cause Satan, not Jesus, to stumble and fall, having disobeyed God and misinterpreted the Scriptures’ message. In willful ignorance of right reason and the rhetorical propriety that is its expression, Satan misinterprets Jesus’s rightful place as the Son of God, which Jesus’s willing sacrifice has won him and which will restore man to his former glory in the fullness of time, in fulfillment of the Scriptures. Before the
proper time, which God alone knows, Satan presumptuously appropriates God’s knowledge and power and prematurely sets Jesus on the temple’s highest pinnacle, wrongly concluding that “highest is best.” It is by this misapplication of his reasoning and misappropriation of God’s Authority in the Scriptures that Satan falls: “To whom thus Jesus. Also it is written, / Tempt not the Lord thy God; he said and stood. / But Satan smitten with amazement fell” (4.560-62). Like the writing prophets, whose message he realizes, Jesus rightly interprets the Scriptures in “majestic unaffected style” (4.359). The majesty of Jesus’s words results directly from his stylistic plainness, for it conveys to Satan both verbal and situational irony—verbal irony in that in his plain and unaffected manner, Jesus embodies God’s Word and Authority; situational irony in that Satan falls doubting the Lord God in whose presence he so ought to stand. Jesus is rescued by the angels Satan provoked God the Father to send as evidence of Jesus’s divinity.153 It is only fitting that Milton closes his epic with the Son of God, or God the Son, “unobserv’d / Home to his Mother’s house private return[ing]” (4.639). As the embodiment of the Christian ethic—“the last will be first, and the first will be last”—Jesus, “heir of both worlds” (4.633), humbly returns to his mother’s house that he may prepare himself for the “glorious work…and begin to save mankind” (4.634-35).

Commentators interested in Jesus’s achieving divinity through patient and humble humanity all point to Milton’s use of the Book of Job as the source of his inspiration for Paradise Regained. Responding to many of these commentators is Victoria Kahn, who argues in her essay “Job’s Complaint in Paradise Regained” that Milton takes the Book of Job, which Milton described as a “brief epic” in The Reason of Church Government, as a model for his own epic and

153 In yet another typological move of his own, Milton uses the word “debel” (4.605) to liken the Son’s military defeat of Satan’s “fraudulent conquest” (4.609) of heaven and his casting out of heaven both Satan and his army of rebel angels to Jesus’s patient defense of Satan’s verbal assaults, Satan’s fraudulent misreading of the Son’s proper place as “heir of both worlds” (4.633). Milton uses the word “debel,” which means to “war down,” to remind the reader that Jesus’s earthly discourse in Paradise Regained carries the same military might as the Son’s heavenly discourse in Paradise Lost.
that Milton chose to pattern his character Jesus after the character of Job. In fact, observes Kahn, Milton compares Jesus to Job on four separate occasions in *Paradise Regained*. Like Job, Jesus suffers at the hand of the Adversary, whom God permits to prove Jesus’s faith, patience, and obedience that Jesus might perfect his relationship with God, and similarly, Jesus reveals his humanity most when he complains about his sufferings. Kahn observes that Jesus’s “Jobean rhetoric” is at times less patient than “vehement” and less obedient than “ironical.” That Jesus complains at all suggests that he resembles Job in questioning God’s justice, which permits him to be tried, tempted, and tortured by his Adversary. Kahn thus finds in the Son’s “distinctive rhetoric” a revelation of the Son’s character—his dual nature as both “perfect man” and “incarnate God”—and Kahn believes that “Milton alludes to Job at least in part to alert his readers that the Son’s rhetorical strategies—quotations, mimicry, irony, parody, and playing with the dual meaning of a single word—are precisely the strategies employed by Job in dealing with his comforters” (633). Similar to Job’s parodying of his comforters, Kahn argues, Jesus’s rhetoric parodies Satan’s rhetoric: The Son’s dual nature—the essence of his “distinctive rhetoric”—simultaneously parodies the equivocation inherent in Satan rhetoric (a rhetoric of deception, duplicity, and double meanings), and questions the justice of God’s subjecting him to Satanic rhetoric to begin with. Kahn’s argument thus suggests that the Son’s rhetoric results directly from his dual character or *ethos*, for the Son’s *ethos* can be traced not just to the Authority with which God the Father inspires him during his baptism at the epic’s opening, but also to the development of his authority over the course of his confrontation with Satan.

The question of Jesus’s nature, character, or *ethos* is indeed the central question of Milton’s epic, for it is the argumentative thrust of Jesus’s confrontation with Satan; simply put, Satan is perplexed by the Son’s “Son-hood” and sets out to try and prove the degree or proportion

154 See footnote 139.
of manhood versus godhood that Jesus possesses. Kahn does not refer to Satan’s inquiry into Jesus’s character as a question of propriety: economic propriety in Satan’s measuring the degree of Jesus’s possession of divinity in relation to his own and rhetorical propriety in Satan’s helping to develop by his argument with Jesus Jesus’s own understanding of the proportion of humanity and divinity that is within him. Satan helps to perfect Jesus’s humanity as preparation for Jesus’s rhetorical ministry, his service to mankind as the perfect or complete Christian orator whose *ethos* depends on the proportion of his authority in the Scriptures. Milton anticipates at the end of *Paradise Regained* Jesus’s embodiment of God’s Word, the moment of his humiliation and sacrifice when Jesus realizes the Christian ethic “the last will be first, and the first will be last” and thereby becomes wholly divine in fulfillment of Scriptural prophesy. Jesus’s developing sense of his own divinity over the course of *Paradise Lost*, of which he becomes perfectly aware at the epic’s climax, is Milton’s dramatization of rhetorical propriety in the service of his readers. He reveals to readers in the Son’s dual nature—in the personhood and humanity of Jesus—the portion of divinity that is within them. That portion of propriety (that portion of divine “property” in right reason and Scriptural authority) which God imparts to Jesus at his baptism Jesus himself cultivates over the course of the epic to perfect his humanity and bring it back into some relation with the divine.\textsuperscript{155}

Kahn is therefore right to argue that Jesus’s authority in the epic becomes a condition of Milton’s authority after the Restoration, but she overestimates the politically subversive qualities of Jesus’s character in politicizing Milton’s motives. Kahn makes it a negative condition of Jesus’s increasing authority when she interprets his rhetoric as questioning God’s justice, and it

\textsuperscript{155} I use the word “cultivate” to emphasize Milton’s intention in *Paradise Regained*, which is to show how Jesus recovers for humanity what humanity lost when Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s Word and were thereafter banished from their proper sphere of life in the garden of Eden and their proper sphere of activity in “cultivating” the garden.
suggests that Milton parodies Jesus’s apparent or, at the very least, vacillating patience to urge his readers to some measure of political resistance. Kahn is careful in her argument, however, claiming that Jesus’s ironical rhetoric, which she claims signifies Milton’s parody of “the false comforts of the Restoration” (627), is directed toward Satan alone. But the Jobean-Christian complaint at the heart of her argument still suggests that Milton demonstrates his resistance to the Restoration in Jesus’s impatience with God’s trials. Kahn suggests kairotic propriety when she politicizes Milton’s motives, claiming that in *Paradise Regained* Milton “defend[s] the saeculum, the space of time between the Incarnation and the Second Coming that dictates the separation of church and state, and the patient anticipation of the right occasion for political action” (627), yet in so doing, she risks ascribing duplicity to Jesus’s dual nature and evil to God’s Providence in permitting Jesus’s tribulations. Milton intends neither. For all of the agonistic rhetoric of his prose polemics, Milton wants to impart to readers of *Paradise Regained* a sense of kairotic propriety based solely in the Scriptures, in Jesus’s antitypical relation to Job’s patient suffering and Jesus’s antitypical fulfillment of Old Testament prophesy. Jesus’s rhetoric is double (both human and divine), but not duplicitous on that account, for as Milton’s model of the “perfect man,” Jesus is at once a means of “perfecting humanity” by means of his “perfect divinity.” The “means” of Jesus’s divinity that so perplexes Satan and keeps him discoursing (Latin for “running to and fro”) in search of it in *Paradise Regained* is that portion of divine light or right reason that Satan has lost.

When in his banishment and blindness Milton writes *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, he turned not to the impassioned and agonistic political rhetoric of his prose tracts, but

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156 By suggesting that Jesus questions God’s justice in *Paradise Regained*, Kahn risks arriving at what she concludes is “the extreme version of this line of interpretation with regard to *Paradise Lost*” offered by William Empson in *Milton’s God*. 
rather to the patient and enduring religious rhetoric of his poetry. As Milton “argues” in “When I Consider How My Light Is Spent,” “They also serve who only stand and wait.” In this one of Milton’s most reflective poems upon his physical-spiritual condition, which, after all, is the human condition, Milton treats the sense of propriety that underwrites the Christian ethos: economic propriety as that portion of divine “light,” which is God’s gift of right reason and authority to humanity that it might rightly and righteously serve God, and which is precisely what Milton considers how best to “spend” in this poem that he may “serve therewith [his] Maker, and present / [His] true account”; rhetorical propriety as that all too human part of him that at first questions God’s justice—“‘Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?’ I fondly ask.”—but then reflects that which is divine in him—“But patience, to prevent / That murmur soon replies, God doth not need / Either man’s work or his own gifts; who best / Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best”; and finally kairotic propriety as those virtues—faith, patience, obedience—that characterize the Christian ethos and whose expression motivates Christian rhetoric. Milton’s final reflection on (of?) the divine light is thus the Christian inversion, “They also serve who only stand and wait,” which is to say, by mastering themselves they serve God best.

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157 This is not to say that Milton rejected his former political commitments, but rather that Milton’s religio-political rhetoric has developed or matured in Paradise Regained. Much like Jesus who is his model of perfect oratory, Milton embraces patience and humility as virtues indicative of a truly Christian ethos in its expression in Christian rhetoric. Both the authority and argument of his later prose and poetry is thus increasingly motivated by these virtues. See John Coffey’s “Pacifist, Quietist, or Patient Militant? John Milton and the Restoration,” David Norbrook’s “Republican Occasions in Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes,” Thomas Corn, Laura Knoppers, N. H. Keeble, et al., all of whom debate in the same volume (Milton Studies 42) the question of whether Milton remained the “committed polemicist” in his later writings.


Chapter 6, Part 1

Taylor’s “Decorum of Imperfections” Reconsidered:

The Propriety of Placing Edward Taylor’s Poetry

Literary scholars have struggled to “place” Edward Taylor’s poetry since its discovery in 1936 when Thomas H. Johnson requested Taylor’s “Poetical Works” from Yale University library’s rare manuscript collection. Johnson’s discovery uniquely positioned the first generation of Taylor scholars—among them Donald E. Stanford, Norman Grabo, Charles Mignon, and Karl Keller—to consider the place Taylor’s writings would hold in English letters. These scholars primarily struggled with two considerations: The first was Taylor’s place in the American literary tradition. Taylor’s poetry could not be properly compared to the religious poetry of his contemporaries in part because his poetry’s stylistic peculiarities and metaphorical range differed so strikingly from theirs. A second consideration was whether Taylor could be fairly compared to his near contemporaries in England, metaphysical poets like Donne, Herbert, and Crashaw, whose verses are simply more readable than Taylor’s. When compared to the poetry of his contemporaries, Taylor’s style has been considered “convoluted,” his metaphorical correspondences have been called “confused,” and though he is credited with having prepared his manuscripts with great care, more than one of Taylor’s editors have mentioned the painstaking difficulty of transcribing his “crabbed” handwriting.

These first scholars’ concerns about the place of Taylor’s poetry have since been elevated to commonplaces among the second generation of Taylor scholars, some of whom work to establish, and others to recover, Taylor’s place in the American canon. Two questions underwrite
this debate: Under what conditions can Puritan poetry be considered “poetic”? And if a Puritan poetics can be adequately defined, how exactly does Taylor’s poetry fit into this paradigm? These questions concerning the “place” or “fittingness” of Taylor’s poetry position every commentator following the first generation to focus in one way or another on the propriety of Taylor’s poetry, especially when debating its literary quality. In this first generation of Taylor scholars, Charles Mignon first focused the debate on literary propriety, in his 1968 *PMLA* essay “Edward Taylor’s *Preparatory Meditations*: A Decorum of Imperfections.” In this essay, Mignon traces the early critical assessment of Taylor’s literary decorum to Louis Martz’s “Foreward” to Donald E. Stanford’s 1960 Yale edition of *The Poems of Edward Taylor*, in which Martz invites comparison between Taylor and Herbert’s poetry. A reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement* found the comparison not merely inappropriate, but unwarranted, which raised questions about Taylor’s reputation as a poet compared to the “metaphysicals.” “And in so doing,” writes Mignon, “th[is] reviewer raised serious questions about Taylor’s *position* as a poet” (1423).\(^{158}\) Mignon’s focus on the “place” of Taylor’s poetry not only in the American literary canon, but also in relation to the English metaphysical poets clarifies for subsequent commentators that literary propriety is an issue when dealing with writings of Edward Taylor. Mignon concludes in “A Decorum of Imperfections” that the comparison Martz invites between Taylor and the metaphysicals is unfounded when judged by the criterion of decorum—that a stylistic comparison simply doesn’t “fit” given how removed Taylor’s stylistic concerns are from those of the metaphysicals. Commentators following Mignon have tried by one argument or another to recover Taylor from (largely New Critical) statements that there is very little in Puritan poetry that can be thought “poetical” by modern literary standards, or by early modern literary tastes for that matter.

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\(^{158}\) My emphasis. Douglass E. Stanford’s Yale edition of *The Poems of Edward Taylor* has long served as the approved edition of Edward Taylor’s poetry. Mignon is first to characterize the debate as one of “proper placement,” a debate over the literary propriety of Taylor’s poetry which Martz’s comparison between Taylor and the metaphysical poets in his “Foreward” to the Stanford seems to have sparked.
Informing Mignon’s separation of Edward Taylor’s “decorum of imperfections” from the Elizabethan religious poets’ concept of decorum are critical assessments of American symbolic expression against the backdrop of English letters. Mignon argues that such assessments are improperly contextualized and simply unfair. Critics following Mignon have largely reached the same conclusions and point out, as does Mason Lowance in *The Language of Canaan*, that “the Puritans have been blamed for the sparse imagistic quality of colonial literature, and for the castigation of the artist in American society” (2). Lowance traces this censure to Charles Feidelson’s book, *Symbolism in American Literature*, a seminal New Critical approach to American literature that sought to establish a distinctly American literary tradition alongside the more serious and certainly older tradition of English letters. Feidelson blames the bland Puritan imagination and poor aesthetic quality of colonial literature for the slow formation of an American literary heritage, arguing more specifically that

The intellectual stance of the conscious artist in American literature has been determined very largely by problems inherent in the method of the Puritans. The isolation of the American artist in society, so often lamented, is actually parallel to the furtive and unacknowledged role of the artistic method in the American mind; both factors began in the seventeenth century with the establishment of Puritan philosophy and of a society that tried to live by it. Hence, the crudity or conventionality of a great part of American literature from 1620 through the third quarter of the nineteenth century may be no more surely attributed to frontier conditions, provinciality, and industrialism than to inherited mental habits which proscribed a functional artistic form. (18-19)
Lowance contends that Feidelson’s very influential dismissal of Puritan aesthetic principles is not properly historicized—that, to be sure, Puritan authors sought a literature that would instruct their audiences, but not entirely to the detriment of pleasing them. In fact, even Puritan sermon writers, who sought an easy didacticism that would please not for its own sake, but for the sake of moving the souls of their congregants along with their senses, were well versed in the art of rhetoric and its Ciceroonian commonplace that if oratory is to teach and move its hearers, it must also please them.

Lowance rightly cites Perry Miller to make his case, for Miller’s *New England Mind* is to Puritan intellectual history what Feidelson’s *Symbolism in American Literature* is to the intellectual and aesthetic history of American letters. Whereas Feidelson traces the “crudity” and “conventionality” of American literature before the American Renaissance to the “functional value” of Puritan literature, Miller properly historicizes Puritan aesthetic principles when they were at their height in the English revolutionary period. Miller writes in *The New England Mind* that

> The supreme criterion of the style was [for Puritans], inescapably, the doctrine of means; metaphors were more prized than antitheses, similes more admired than assonances, because they were better instruments for convincing the mind and moving the passions. Scripture itself used earthly similitudes, comparisons and parables, ‘to convey truth to us under sensible things, things that wee can feele, because that we are led with senses in this life.’ (qtd. in Lowance 1)

Miller characterizes the Puritan aesthetic as a “functional aesthetic,” which would instruct the Puritan imagination in the *proper use* of “earthly similitudes.” Images not eschatological in their intent were merely gratuitous and, as such, dangerous in that they did little more than darken the
sense of the Scriptures. “Sensible things” must always reveal Scriptural truths, argues Lowance, a way of reading and writing the world that might be considered “crude,” “conventional,” or perhaps simply too “rigid” for critics and literary historians whose aesthetic categories have developed from the New Critical paradigm. Puritans’ use of figural correspondences—metaphor, simile, typology—take shape in a closed symbolic system in which historical persons, places, or actions serve as either prophetic or salvific symbols, and little more.  

In his “Introduction” to Jonathan Edwards’ *Images and Shadows of Divine Things*, Perry Miller explains the Puritan aesthetic this way: “By temperament and by deliberate intention the Puritan was less of an ‘imagist’ and more of an ‘allegorist.’ He was not insensible to beauty or sublimity, but in the face of every experience he was obliged to ask himself, what does this signify? What is God saying to me at this moment?” (4). Miller suggests that it was the “temperament” of the Puritan writer to function merely as instrument of God’s revelation and the “deliberate intention” of the Puritan reader to wring personal and communal significance from experiences saturated with Scriptural meaning. Lowance finds two faults in Miller’s articulation of the Puritan aesthetic: The first is that he underestimates the sophistication of Puritan

159 Lowance explains that Puritans’ preference for typology to allegory had been largely motivated by their fear that allegorical exegesis encourages freer and more subjective associations than typological exegesis, which is a tighter and more controlled way of reading the Scriptures. Lowance traces the Puritans’ figural preferences through Augustine to the writings of St. Paul, whose own exegetical approach focused especially on the redemptive work of God in and through history. Just as St. Paul differed from Philo in preferring typology to allegory, so too did Augustine differ from Tertullian in his typological approach to Scripture. Lowance explains the difference:  

Typology emphasizes the historical and the concrete and is set within a linear scheme of time; allegory is abstract and nonhistorical, and the allegorist places little value on typology’s scheme of prophecy and fulfillment. ‘Figural interpretation [typology] established a connection between two events or persons, the first of which signifies not only itself but the second, while the second encompasses or fulfills the first. The two poles of the figure are separate in time, but both being real events or figures, are within time, within the stream of historical life.’ (21)  

Citing Eric Auerbach’s *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* to clarify the distinction, Lowance here shows that typology lends itself to Scriptural correspondences linking Old Testament figures and places as “types” anticipating “antitypes” and historical events as “prophesies” anticipating “fulfillment” in the New Testament. Puritans took typology a step further, reading their own place in history as “antitypical” to the Israelites’ and, therefore, a close antecedent of the Messiah’s second coming.
imagination when he writes that Puritan sermon rhetoric achieves a “homely” style in being addressed to the common person. The second is that he defines allegory, not typology, as the key figure in which Puritans expressed their literary imaginations. The Puritan, Lowance argues, was more of a “typologist” than an “allegorist.” Puritans preferred typology to allegory largely because allegory is abstract and nonhistorical and typology seeks real, living figures that are merely separated by the progression of time, the figures—type and antitype—serving in this time scheme as prophesy and its fulfillment, as for example Christ serving as a “new Adam,” purifying humanity by his sinless sacrifice of the stain of Adam’s original sin. Puritans sought similar typological correspondences in their every lives. Lowance is therefore right to argue that Miller devalues the sophistication of Puritan aesthetic experience by labeling it “homely,” though Miller is right to characterize the question Puritan asked in the face of every experience as “What is God saying to me at this moment?”

Evidence on both sides of the debate over the literary worth of Puritan writing focuses on the effects and affect of sermon rhetoric as well as on the aesthetic qualities of Puritan poetics. That Puritans used some of the same rhetorical strategies in their poetics suggests that Miller’s key question of Puritan lived experience—What is God saying to me at this moment?—pervaded their attempts to signify those experiences in their writing. Commentators who offer Puritan rhetoric or poetics as an index of Puritans’ lived experience recast the terms of the debate to focus less on the historical value and more on the literary merits of Puritan writing. In his book Sinful Self, Saintly Self: The Puritan Experience of Poetry, for instance, Jeffrey Hammond calls for a reassessment of the terms of the debate:

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Instead of applying aesthetic expectations external to the poetry itself and thereby stressing what it fails to do, we might profitably read it on its own terms, accepting its frankly didactic aims and discussing it in light of those aims. Behind such a reading lie two fundamental assumptions. First, Puritan poetry cannot be understood apart from the aesthetic expectations of Puritan writers and readers. And second, Puritan literary experience cannot be divorced from Puritan religious experience. [Take any Puritan poem, for instance.] Would readers who did not distinguish between aesthetic and spiritual response have been disappointed by the trite imagery . . . or the generic nature of its speaker? Would its relentlessly biblical message and diction have suggested to them, as it might to us, a failure of poetic invention, a substituting of formula for art? . . . . Answering these questions in terms of the larger question that Puritan poems were written to answer—whether or not one was saved—permits our recovery of an experiential dimension in these texts that stems ultimately from biblical definitions of literary art and personal identity. (8)

Like Lowance, Hammond argues that in order to fairly assess the literary value of Puritan poetics, we must first historicize it and read it as Puritan readers would have—with an aesthetic sensibility formed by “biblical definitions of literary art and personal identity.” Proper placement of Puritan writing means bending to meet its aesthetic demands rather than bending it to meet ours. Critical commentary after Fiedelson seems to establish the Jamesonian imperative “Always historicize!” as the common ground of critical propriety. It is no surprise, then, that when critics assess the work of individual poets, they not only preface their analyses with the same commonplace—that to assess the work properly, we must first historicize its intentions—but also become keenly aware of the work’s stylistic propriety within these parameters: that Puritan readers did not
distinguish between aesthetic intention and spiritual response. Edward Taylor forces commentators to confront the problem of literary propriety like no other Puritan poet, for although his poetry always assumes Miller’s question—What is God saying to me at this moment?—or Hammond’s question—Am I saved or damned?—it very often slips between conventional and unconventional style, even by Puritan standards. In “A Decorum of Imperfections,” Mignon does well to focus critical attention on literary decorum as an issue central to the reception and placement of Taylor’s poetry in the American canon, but he doesn’t go far enough in theorizing propriety as the foundation of Puritan aesthetics. Subsequent critics have also commented on the aesthetic peculiarities of Taylor’s poetry, but like Mignon, they have undertheorized the extent to which propriety serves as ground upon which Taylor grapples with a truly Puritan poetics.

Mignon’s stylistic analysis of Taylor’s “Prologue” and various other of Taylor’s meditative poems clarifies “decorum” as the criterion of placement, though his essay also suggests forms of propriety beyond stylistic propriety that inform what Mignon calls the “concept of Taylor’s decorum” (1424). Mignon locates Taylor’s decorum in his use of meiosis, which Taylor uses from the very opening verses of his “Prologue” to the Preparatory Meditations. In a move otherwise unbecoming of Taylor, who consistently struggles to address the Lord directly, Taylor opens his “Prologue” posing the Lord two rhetorical questions:

Lord, Can a Crumb of Dust the Earth outweigh,

Outmatch all mountains, nay the Chrystall Sky?

Imbosom in’t designs that shall Display
And trace into the Boundless Deity? (lines 1-4)\textsuperscript{161}

Rhetorical questions imply a certain presumptuousness or impertinence that little suits a religious poet’s address to God, much less the first lines of a series of poems celebrating God’s awful sovereignty. Taylor’s surety in these lines rests upon a fact with which God, Taylor, and the reader can all agree: Taylor is the “Crumb of Dust” whose pen can trace neither the outline of Creation, nor that of its Creator. The speaker’s seeming presumptuousness in the prologue’s first stanza propels the reader to the poem’s third stanza, in which Taylor reestablishes the decorum one expects of the Calvinist poet. His lines undo, or rather “unbecome,” the impertinent tone with which he opens the poem, and Taylor constructs from the third stanza onward the paradoxical identity with which he attempts to “come to terms”—i.e. for which he struggles to find the proper expression—in nearly every meditation that follows the “Prologue.”

Taylor’s ironic self-assertion in the prologue’s third stanza rings with the “I am” of the Mosaic scriptures, that mysterious and paradoxical Old Testament utterance that resists both identity and containment in a name. Taylor writes,

\begin{quote}
I am this Crumb of Dust which is design’d
To make my Pen unto thy Praise alone
And my dull Phancy I would gladly grinde
Unto an Edge on Zions Pretious Stone.
And Write in Liquid Gold upon thy Name
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{161} I follow Mignon in referring to the Preparatory Meditations by series and number, e.g. 1.19, and here forward use this method to distinguish these citations from citations of Gods Determinations. Unlike Mignon, however, citations of both texts are from Edward Taylor’s Gods Determinations and Preparatory Meditations: A Critical Edition, ed. Daniel Patterson (Kent, Ohio: Kent State UP, 2003).
The stanza’s first line makes a chiasmic turn on the relative clause “which is design’d,” a turn that Taylor begins setting up in the second stanza, where he lays out the conditions under which praise of “the Boundless Deity” might be considered appropriate, or merely adequate:

If it its Pen had of an Angels Quill,

And Sharpened on a Pretious Stone ground tite,

And dipt in Liquid Gold, and mov’d by Skill

In Christall leaves should golden Letters write

It would but blot and blur yea jag, and jar

Unless thou mak’st the Pen, and Scribener. (lines 7-12)

Even gilded letters of praise skillfully written upon crystal pages blot, blur, jag and jar unless God is their author-producer. Taylor’s “thou mak’st” (line 12) directly anticipates the “Dust . . . design’d” (line 13) in the line and stanza that follows. The chiasmic turn Taylor makes in line 13—“I am this Crumb of Dust which is design’d”—reveals the paradox of his position as author-producer of God’s praise.

Taylor is merely an instrument of praise, much like the pen, which God makes, sharpens, and moves that he might be glorified. Taylor identifies himself as the “Crumb of Dust . . . design’d / To make . . . thy Praise” rather than the “designer of God’s praise,” and as the “Scribener” whose pen is “mov’d by Skill” not his own, which suggests that a form of propriety different from stylistic decorum informs the paradoxical position of the Calvinist poet. Taylor repositions God as sole author—sole proprietor—of his own praise in the poem, and readers
cannot help but note that the “Christ-all leaves”\textsuperscript{162} upon which the poet “Write[s] in Liquid Gold . . . / [His] Letters till thy glory forth doth flame” (lines 10, 17-18) becomes in the third stanza—again, the stanza in which Taylor sounds his self-assertive “I am”—“th[e] Name” upon which the poet writes his words. Taylor understands Christ as proprietor, the model of right, rightful, and righteous praise whose merciful sacrifice has purchased Taylor’s (and all of humanity’s) debt. In the pun “Christall leaves” Taylor acknowledges that Christ or the Word-made-flesh is the “palimpsest” upon which he writes his words of praise, the “underwriting” that forms and informs his own writing. Taylor thus questions whether his writing is truly his own, which is a question of propriety in any case.

Mignon’s focus on stylistic propriety in Taylor’s “Prologue” to the \textit{Preparatory Meditations} certainly begs analysis of other forms of propriety implied in Taylor’s verses, for Taylor’s diction everywhere suggests meiosis. For instance, Mignon writes of the pen pushed merely by Taylor, the “Crumb of Dust,” that

\begin{quote}
The only true poetry that does not \textit{blot}, blur, jag, and \textit{jar} is the heavenly poetry of praise—the praise of God \textit{in heaven}, not on earth. And man cannot of his own will create any praise of God worthwhile unless God Himself gives grace to the materials and by grace enables the poet to write. Even then success is really God’s, not man’s, and the success is qualified by man’s fallen condition. Nothing, including poetry, can even momentarily succeed in a total Calvinist context without the free gift of God’s grace to man, whether he is an artist or not. So the Calvinist artist is first a human being. Accordingly his art cannot be worthy the praise of God unless it is inspired by God’s grace. Art is thus related\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{162} My emphasis.
to Election. Because even man’s regeneration is imperfect in this world, his artistic success is a limited, fallen, and momentary one. (1424)

Mignon resolves that Taylor’s “concept of decorum” is a “decorum of imperfections,” which calls into question the very idea of the Calvinist poet, for if, as Mignon points out, the propriety of the poet’s praise of God becomes the criterion of good style, rhetorical efficacy, or aesthetic achievement, then the Calvinist poet can only be said to have always-already failed. Mignon argues that, if by “decorum” we mean that the poet’s images suit the occasion and subject—the cause and purpose—he has in mind (1423), then Taylor’s sense of decorum differs strikingly from other religious poets’. In fact, Mignon argues, we must look to the entire corpus of Taylor’s writings, for these writings are motivated by a painful awareness of incompletion and imperfection—that the purpose of his art is to procure his salvation and render beautifully the glory of God. Precisely what characterizes the Calvinist poet’s peculiar aesthetic sense is his recognition that his sinfulness makes him “incapable of earning salvation and creating beautiful poetry,” so that both ends of his art are frustrated at outset.

Mignon’s focus on Taylor’s self-depreciation pushes to the margins of his analysis of the “Prologue” the turn Taylor makes in line 13 of the poem. Taylor’s self-identification as the very “Crumb of Dust” with which he opens and closes the poem does indeed make his “I am a Crumb of Dust” a Christian inversion of the Mosaic “I am,” the origin and end of all things. Just as God’s grace and glory are superabundant, shining outward upon Creation, infusing and inspiring it with the same light that reflects God’s image back Him, so too is Taylor inspired and his words infused by the Word over or upon which he writes. For the Christian poet, this “inversion” ends in a kind of “reversion” to (or of) the Scriptures, a paraphrastic search for the most appropriate turns of phrase with which the poet rewrites the very Scriptures that inspire him and give his or
her words life and meaning. Mignon offers the principle tension of the Calvinist poet as the poet’s keen awareness that “suitable singing on earth is determined by the operation of grace,” that on account of his sinful, fallen nature, he is “incapable of earning salvation and of creating beautiful poetry” (1424). Taylor employs meiosis to mediate this tension between his artistic sensibility and his uncertainty about his own election. What separates Calvinist poets from one another is largely the style in which they express their relation to the divine. Whereas an English puritan writer like Milton invokes the Holy Spirit as his muse, by whose inspiration he moves beyond the religious lyric to achieve the heights of Christian epic and in it presume to “justify the ways of God to men,” a New England Puritan writer like Taylor must admit that his poetic expressions can never properly signify God’s glory. Taylor’s use of meiosis is no rhetorical move, and certainly not a kind of Christian sprezzatura whereby he hides his art behind an affected humility. Rather, meiosis runs into metaphor in his poetry as Taylor signifies the falls and flights of the Calvinist spiritual condition.

Taylor at once finds metaphors to amplify his praise of God’s glory, but recognizes the futility of finding metaphors that suitably express his praise. Unlike Milton, the principle poetic problem for Taylor is not invention, for he finds a wealth of poetic materials in the Scriptures. Rather, for Taylor, the principle poetic problem is elocution. The language materials he is called to work with in both of his vocations—as minister and poet—he finds always-already fallen, failed and sullied by sin. He finds far better expressions of God’s glory in the Scriptures, yet he is called to glorify God and dutifully find signs of his (and his congregants’) salvation in the very materials of both vocations. He writes, for example, in Meditation 1.21 that the poetic materials with which he would sing God’s praise are soiled, not sublime:

163 See Chapter 5, “The ‘Contracted Palm’ to the ‘Open Hand,’” in which I argue that the principle problem of Milton’s rhetoric and poetics is invention, not style.
What Glory’s this, my Lord?

. . . .

Oh! Bright! Bright thing! I fain would something say:

Lest Silence should indict me. Yet I feare

To say a Syllable lest at thy day

I be presented for my Tattling here,

Course Phancy, Ragged Faculties, alas!

And Blunted Tongue don’t Suit: Sighs Soile the Glass. (lines 1, 7-12)

Taylor takes Philippians 2:9 “God hath highly exalted him” as the source text upon which he meditates in this poem. The text encourages *imitatio Christi*:

If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,

Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. (Phil. 2:1-4)
The text encourages a merging with the spirit of Christ, whose lowly service to mankind achieved the greatest glory in heaven. Taylor struggles in *Meditation* 1.21 with the necessity of being "likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind" with Christ. This sense of merging with the awesome humility and love of Christ reminds Taylor that the words which are the materials of his vocation are given clearer expression in the Word that is Christ’s ministry; Taylor recognizes that his “Tongue don’t Suit,” his “Sighs [merely] Soile the Glass.” The “Glass” to which Taylor here refers recalls the “Christall leaves” of the “Prologue,” the palimpsest Word upon or over which Taylor would write his own, the Word that shines through his own words and gives them life and meaning. As in the “Prologue,” Taylor admits that his words can only blot Christ’s clear expression of God’s glory. For if Christ’s ministry can be understood as the palimpsest underwriting Taylor’s own vocation as minister-poet, then Taylor aims to line up his words with Christ’s own, even as he knows full well that he will fail to properly sing God’s glory simply because the “Christall leaves” upon which he writes are “Oh! Bright! [Too] Bright [a] thing!”

Several of Taylor’s meditative verses following the “Prologue” reveal the poet’s painful awareness of the momentary nature of poetic flight. Taylor’s mixing of meiosis with metaphor, as well as his mixing of metaphors, registers his anxiety about his inability to sustain his amplification of God’s praise. Mignon argues that the confusing mixtures of metaphoric praise and meiotic self-depreciation that readers discover in Taylor’s *Meditations* are precisely the reason why his poetry doesn’t bear comparison to the poetry of the metaphysicals. Metaphysical poets have wider metaphorical range and more control with their conceits, Mignon concludes, simply because they value man’s place in Creation more highly than Taylor does. Herbert, for instance, whose poetry bears closest resemblance to Taylor’s, refers to “Man” not as woefully degraded by sin, but rather as the “center” of Creation: “[M]an is ev’ry thing”; “Man is all
symmetrie”; “He is in little all the sphere” (“Man,” lines 7, 13, and 22). Herbert’s placement of man at the center of Creation, whereby he (i.e. man and Herbert by extension) becomes a reflection of the Creator, offers him metaphoric range and proportion, a sense of stylistic cohesion predicated on worldly conceits. Herbert celebrates man as a measure of creative “symmetrie,” which also elevates the place of the poet as the singer of this praise—a form of worldly praise that the poet can attain and sustain. Taylor, however, decries the place and condition of man as the cause of Creation’s fall from grace, which renders the place of the poet as seeker of grace and singer of God’s praise both unattainable and unsustainable.

Taylor’s poetic designs have Scriptural precedent, however. Many critics cite Taylor’s treatment of the “rich and varied” mixture of metaphors he found in the Canticles text as the ground of his sense of literary propriety. Critics find in Taylor’s references to the Canticles text an interesting exegetical “proving ground” for dealing with the Scriptures’ use of figurative language, for the Canticles present the reader with an allegorical celebration of the Christian church’s relationship to Christ—an allegory whose figures, on a literal level, signify an erotic relationship. Puritan paraphrases of the Canticles proliferated in large part because the text eludes the conventional typological reading of the Scriptures Puritans inherited from St. Augustine and St. Paul. The Song has little real, historical value apart from being attributed to King Solomon, a meditation Solomon wrote in old age upon the beauty of the bridegroom, well after his writings on wisdom—Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Its historical value becomes apparent in the Canticles’

164 Herbert’s aesthetic appeal to man’s “symmetrie” echoes Augustine’s early aesthetic principles in On the Beautiful and the Fitting, in which Augustine defines his sense of beauty as “unity in symmetry.” See Chapter 1, “Rhetorical Propriety in Augustine’s On Christian Doctrine.” For Augustine, “symmetry” is an expression of the supremely rational mind of God, traces of which man observes in the natural world; however, as he admits in the Confessions, Augustine based his definition of beauty on Neo-Platonic thinking, so that his developing theology and hermeneutics was, even in his later writings, in constant tension with his early training in classical philosophy and its rhetoric, from which he tried to distance himself after his conversion to Christianity. In his religious mediation on “Man,” Herbert reveals the classical roots of his humanist education.
relationship to the other texts attributed to Solomon insofar as the arrangement of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Canticles in the canon marks Solomon’s spiritual maturation, by which he turns from the church in Ecclesiastes (Gr. ekklesia, church or congregation) to his personal reflections on the coming of the messiah. Its prophetic value is apparent, of course, in Solomon’s foreshadowing the coming Christ. Puritans on both sides of the Atlantic emphasized not only these typological elements of the Canticles text, but also the text’s allegorical elements as precedent for the personalizing of their relationship to Christ. Lowance Mason writes, for instance, that

The allegorical mode was easily adaptable to the personalizing of biblical figures, a common practice among seventeenth-century poets of Catholic and Reformed persuasion. Figurative language allowed the creative writer a flexible range that was not as readily available under the most conservative strictures of typological exegetical practices. [English Calvinist theologian and minister] John Gill wrote:

The whole [of Canticles] is figurative and allegorical, abounding with a variety of lively metaphors . . . This divine poem sets forth in the most striking manner the mutual love, union, and communion, which are between Christ and his church; also expresses the several different frames, cases, and circumstances, which attend the believers in this life; so that they can come into no state or condition, but here is something in this song suited to their experience which serves to recommend it to believers, and discovers the excellency of it.

Gill’s impression is almost romantic in its impulse; the allegory is so rich and varied that in it there is something for everyone, where the historical figural
reading demanded a more precise association between individual, historical movement, and the sequential dispensation of God’s grace through Providence.

(47-48)

Lowance’s recognition of Gill’s finding “something for everyone” in the Canticles text suggests that the Canticles are written, much like Puritans viewed the entirety of the Scriptures, with a sense of perfect rhetorical propriety. As Gill argues, the allegorical tendencies and metaphorical variety of the Canticles address the different “circumstances . . . [that] attend . . . believers in this life; so that they can come into no state or condition, but [the Canticles offer] something . . . suited to their experience.” The Canticles thus offer the Puritan poet who is constrained by typological readings of Scripture the metaphorical range and allegorical license to express his and others’ spiritual conditions.

Mignon argues that in many of Taylor’s poems, and especially in “The Reflexion,” which is tucked early in the first series between “Meditation 1.4” whose source text is Canticles 2:1 “I am the Rose of Sharon,” and “Meditation 1.5” whose source text is Canticles 2:1 “The Lilly of the Vallies,” Taylor draws on the metaphorical richness of the Canticles text to support his poetic designs. He mixes his metaphors much like Solomon does, not merely to observe Christ’s physical attributes, but also to celebrate “Christ’s redemptive excellency” (1426). Whereas Gill and Lowance find “something in this song suited to [the spiritual condition and] experience” of every believer that encourages him or her to reflect upon the majesty of Christ, Mignon finds in this same metaphorical mixture the suggestion that figural language is unsuitable for expressing the majesty of Christ. Mignon contends that

When we read the Song of Solomon are we not asked to believe that the bridegroom is “beyond description”—that the only way to describe his perfection
is by metaphors—metaphors which “Speake Hyperbolically” of Christ? And in Taylor’s case are we not asked to believe that these metaphors (the lilies, gold, jewels, ivory, sapphires, and alabaster that stud his poems) are simply borrowings from scripture designed to heighten our perception of a Grace that “excels all Metaphors”? (1426)

This paraphrastic imperative is motivated by the Calvinist poet’s anxiety about finding the proper language with which to express the glory of God and beauty of Christ. If the Scriptures themselves fail, then the problem is language, not the religious poet’s lack of taste or wit.

Critics writing in the wake of Mignon’s essay, “Decorum of Imperfections,” tend to focus on the problem of language as the impetus of Taylor’s stylistic peculiarities, but few have directly followed Mignon in ascribing these peculiarities to Taylor’s concern with the propriety of language for religious expression. William Scheick observes in his book *Design in Puritan American Literature*, for instance, that of all of Taylor’s poetry, the *Preparatory Meditations* particularly “tended to disturb critics during the 1940s and 1950s, when various efforts were made to [place Taylor’s poetry] and explain what seemed to some to be inept awkwardness or a Roman Catholic disposition in the poet’s work” (30). What troubles even later critics, continues Scheick, is the resistance Taylor’s poetry poses to easy categorization, which he ascribes to critics’ relative unwillingness to “appreciate the pluralism of Puritan culture or the intensity of Puritan sacramentality” (30). Implied in Scheick’s assessment of this critical problem of properly “placing” Taylor’s poetry is not only the sort of literary-religious propriety Mignon has in mind when he labels unwarranted and unfair any comparisons between Taylor’s poetics and the poetics of the metaphysicals, but also the strong sense of social propriety to which second-generation Puritans appealed when they found themselves falling away from the ideal religious community.
imagined by the first generation. About the critical reception of Taylor’s style Scheick observes that “Even today a similar hesitation over propriety is occasionally registered in critical remarks on Taylor’s work, and now and then one still encounters the unsupportable notion that because of the unorthodox nature of his verse, Taylor enjoined his heirs never to publish his writings” (30).\footnote{165}

Scheick’s reference is to “the Taylor family’s story about [Edward’s] injunction against publication” (Keller 5). In his essay, “The Example of Edward Taylor,” Karl Keller cites this story to show that the critical impulse, even at the time when Keller published this essay (in 1970), was to romanticize Taylor’s place as minister-poet that commentators might either explain his poetic ineptitude and stylistic peculiarities or rescue his verses from such critical assessments. Keller argues that this kind of commentary exaggerates Taylor’s “will to anonymity” and suggests that Taylor wished to alienate himself from contemporary ministers and poets. In fact, says Keller, though Taylor accepted the call to the Westfield congregation, he remained in close contact with his Boston and Cambridge brethren. He also read widely the prose theology and religious poetry of his contemporaries. Daniel Patterson writes, for instance, in his “Introduction” to the critical edition of Edward Taylor’s Gods Determinations and Preparatory Meditations that while he was at Harvard

Taylor was known as a poet who on public occasions could produce fitting and competent verse. The five poems that survive from Taylor’s three years at the college are all of a public nature (MP 19-35), four being elegies commemorating the lives of prominent New England Puritans. At his commencement on May 5,

\footnote{165 My emphasis. Scheick merely remarks at the opening of his chapter on Taylor, titled “The Winding Sheet of Meditative Verse,” that commentators still argue about the stylistic propriety of Taylor’s Preparatory Meditations.}
1671, Taylor read his only Harvard poem that is not an elegy, “My last Declamation in the Colledge Hall,” a vigorous and complex defense of the English language as well as an early and modest critique of his poetic abilities. (3)

Patterson’s overview of Taylor’s early work suggests that Taylor was neither as private of a poet nor as cut off from the poetry of his contemporaries and near contemporaries as critics have generally considered him to be. Focusing merely on the private nature of the Preparatory Meditations and its stylistic improprieties implies that Taylor was either cut off or incompetent, but as Patterson’s overview shows, Taylor established a reputation “as a poet who on public occasions could produce [both] fitting and competent verse.”

That Taylor had a keen sense of linguistic propriety—whether rhetorical or poetical—is also apparent in his continued correspondence with the Boston and Cambridge congregations after answering the call to be minister of the Westfield congregation. He was at first reluctant to accept this ministry, for some thought Westfield a “wilderness” or “provincial” ministry removed from the more civilized Boston and Cambridge. Taylor writes in his diary of the “extreme uncertainty and ambivalence” he felt about his having been pressed by Thomas Dewey to accept the position, whom Taylor describes as “a Messenger sent from Westfield on Connecticut River, to the Bay for to get a Minister for that people” (38; qtd. in Patterson 3). Admitting his doubts—“I not knowing how to cast down Goodman Dewy’s expectation[s] after I had raised them”—Taylor consulted with then Harvard President Charles Chauncey, who urged him to stay, and Increase Mather, who advised him to go, before he finally and hesitatingly “set forward” on his week-long, late-November trip to Westfield. He describes the trip into the wilderness—“the snow

166 Patterson refers in this paragraph to Edward Taylor’s Minor Poetry. Eds. Thomas M. and Virginia L. Davis.
being about Mid-leg deepe, the way unbeaten, or the track filled up againe, and over rocks and mountains, and the journey being about an 100 miles” (39; qtd. in Patterson 3-4). Taylor was twenty-eight when he set out for Westfield in 1671; that he remained in Westfield fifty-eight years until his death in 1729 at the very least suggests that even in the wilderness, he felt socially and spiritually connected to what was happening back in Boston and Cambridge, the cultural and intellectual centers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Proof of the continued relevance of Taylor’s poetry and prose publications beyond the borders of Westfield is taken up again by Keller, who writes that

[Taylor] wrote a 485-page *Commentary on the Four Gospels*, for example, which was so well thought of that Increase Mather wrote to Dr. John Woodward and other wealthy persons in the Royal Society of London trying to induce them to publish it. The *Christographia* sermons were circulated separately and then later gathered and revised for publication; too complex for the ear, they were to have been printed and read. His essay “Spiritual Relation” was a public proclamation of his convictions and devotion, and his eight sermons, now titled *Treatise Concerning the Lord’s Supper*, were his contribution to the public debate over the Stoddardean heresy. He wrote a pamphlet, *The Appeale Tried*, which was a public defense of Increase Mather and a further criticism of Solomon Stoddard. There is also supposed to have been a quarto volume containing many short occasional poems prepared for publication, and quite a number of Taylor’s funeral elegies, acrostic love verses, and poems for special occasions were read by the bereaved, the beloved, and interested audiences from Westfield to Boston. Further, Taylor’s compendious collections, *Dispensatory* (a pharmacopeia) and
Metallographia (an alchemist’s guide), were the sorts of reference works needed by and shared among frontier doctors of the time. (5-6)

Taylor’s supposed alienation, privacy, or provincialism is, as Keller here shows, seriously overblown.167 His writings on the Stoddardean heresy, which opened the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper to those unregenerate who lived apparently pious lives and enjoyed a good reputation in the community, even if they weren’t tried and proven church members, shows that Taylor was not only acutely aware of the liturgical practices and doctrinal positions of other congregations in the colony, but also more largely concerned that these liturgical changes might threaten the sense of prop(r)iety established by the colony’s first generation.168 Stoddard’s relaxing of the criterion of church membership, and the private ministerial inquest and public profession of faith that proved each member’s piety, rendered the purity of the sacrament questionable and threatened the religious propriety that at once created a sense of cohesion among church members, the desire of those unregenerate to enter into church membership, and the social propriety that established the church at the center of the Puritan settlement and sense of community.

Commentators who are dismissive of Taylor’s public persona and prolific publication as minister and physician to the “frontier” settlement of Westfield wish to emphasize his alienation to explain the stylistic peculiarities and strange aesthetic character of his poetry, particularly the

167 The same might be argued of Cotton Mather’s anxieties about his perceived “provincialism,” especially by his London readers. In his biography of Cotton Mather, The Life and Times of Cotton Mather, Kenneth Silverman argues, for instance, that in many places in his writing, and particularly in his diary, Mather expresses an uneasy ambivalence about his prolific output, admitting that his love for writing did not stem from a desire to celebrate God’s glory, but rather from the “particular Lust” of pride, which stemmed from “affectations of Grandeur, and inclinations to be thought Somebody.” Critics have tried to find similar anxieties in Taylor’s writing, but unlike Mather, Taylor’s ambivalence stems not from his concern that he might be thought “provincial,” but from his concern that he verses might be thought “impious”—thoughts he imagined being sounded not by his Christian brethren, but rather by the “Christic reader” he projected as sole critic of his verses. The “Christic reader” is a term Hammond uses in his book Sinful Self, Saintly Self to explain Taylor’s ambivalent place as a Calvinist poet.

168 As in preceding chapters, by “prop(r)iety” I mean the distinctly Puritan sense of social propriety predicated upon the Puritan expression of religious piety.
**Preparatory Meditations.** While is it true that Taylor wrote the meditations in private to prepare his sermons on doctrine before his approach to the Lord’s Supper and communion with God, through Christ, something of Taylor’s public persona must have carried over into his private devotions. After all, the meditations offered Taylor a chance to work through the doctrine of the Scriptures prior to his administration of the Lord’s Supper, and so prepared his mind and heart for communion with God. These poetic meditations also preceded preaching moments, so Taylor’s method in the meditations was to wrestle with the Scriptures’ message in poetic language in order to preach a sermon that would touch the minds and hearts of his congregants and thus prove rhetorically effective. Taylor’s poetical intentions thus overlap with his rhetorical intentions in the *Preparatory Meditations*, for most if not all the meditations express Taylor’s anxiety that he cannot properly commune with God and, by extension, model an appropriate communion to those of the Puritan community who are members of the church.

The problem is certainly one of religious language, as critics have generally noted in their various approaches to Taylor’s sense of stylistic or literary decorum; however, the language problem is more specifically embedded within the larger problem of communion and community—in every sense of the words “cum-union” or “with-unity”—which suggests that Taylor viewed the stylistic problem as a social problem. Inasmuch as Taylor employs the meditations to prepare himself for communion, our critical focus should be on the religious propriety of these poems. The meditations are, of course, private, but Taylor is keenly aware that he cannot “socialize” with God, which begins at *addressing* God before *praising* God. Taylor struggles to address and praise God in the fallen language conventions of man. This poetic moment also anticipates a preaching moment in which Taylor must prepare others of the Puritan community for communion with God so that the social anxiety he must feel extends beyond the meditative moment of his poetry to the rhetorical moment of his sermon. In his calling as
minister-poet, then, Taylor must use the language materials of his vocation and develop poetical and rhetorical strategies for dealing with what he can only interpret as breaches of social and religious decorum. He must literally “come to terms” with the language problem that accompanies Calvinist religious expression and write in spite of his stylistic and literary indiscretions and rhetorical indecorum. It is part of the Calvinist preacher-poet’s vocation to persist even while knowing that his (language) materials are inadequate to the task. Critics thus analyze the “language problem” of Taylor’s poetry by focusing on the poetry’s stylistic propriety, but this language problem is further complicated by two attendant and very important concerns for Taylor in his calling as a preacher-poet: the first is the rhetorical-religious problem of communion; the second is the social problem of community that the language problem (i.e. the question of properly defining the style, aesthetic, or genre of Taylor’s poetry) largely overlooks.

Following Mignon’s analysis of Taylor’s stylistic peculiarities, which speak to the paradoxical position of the Calvinist poet, William Scheick analyzes in his book Design in Puritan American Literature the “emblems” of Taylor’s mediations, concluding that Taylor’s poetry merely registers a “surface disorder.” Scheick analyzes “Meditation 1.19,” arguing that the seeming confusion of Taylor’s figures, which collectively point to a cohesive semantic design, is evidence of Taylor’s eagerness to escape fallen syntactical forms:

Caught in the bounds of fallen time, [“Meditation 1.19”] is connotatively sinuous indeed, replete with syntactic, imagistic, and thematic entanglements. The surface disorder of his meditation suggests how the serpent [Satan’s] bond exerts its entwining hold on the fallen poet and his poem, replete with double-talk. Yet, this double-talk in the meditation is a logologic site where the threat of dispersed

169 My emphasis.
meaning (the demise of the poet) intersects with the promise of reclaimed referentiality (the redemption of the poet). Artistically concealed beneath the surface of the various kinds of convolutions evident in the proliferation of meanings are subtle coalescences and an ultimate circularity disclosing the unifying denotative artistry of God revealed in Genesis and Revelation. (65)

Scheick discovers a more holistic (and holy) order beyond the poem’s apparent disorder, concluding that the poem’s apparent disorder illustrates the poet’s confrontation with the “entanglements” of the serpent. “Meditation 1.19” reveals a poet conscious of being trapped in fallen time and syntax, so that poetic redemption—the poet’s solution to the “language problem” of adequately communing or communicating with God—is at once deferred to some future moment of poetic justice (in the final judgment) and presently diffused throughout the poem by an act of mercy. As Scheick contends, the poem becomes a “logodic site where the threat of dispersed meaning (the demise of the poet) intersects with the promise of reclaimed referentiality (the redemption of the poet).”

Scheick doubly positions Taylor: first, at the center of the early American canon, concluding that Taylor achieves stylistic inventiveness and coherence precisely where other critics have read ineptitude and confusion; and second, at the center of a hermeneutic circle, showing that Taylor weaves a complex web of Scriptural, cultural, historical, and literary references whose texture begs analysis as fine or finer than Taylor’s own poetic achievement. Scheick observes that in a poetic move reminiscent of Augustine’s use of classical rhetoric, Taylor baptizes pagan myth for Christian ends—specifically, the labors of Hercules:

The classical versions of Hercules’s destruction of the evil giant progeny of the rebellious sons of gods, his harrowing of Hades, and his defeat of the serpent
guarding the tree of golden apples in the gardens of the Hesperides suggest to Taylor the antitypical New Testament activities of Christ. And these Classical stories, as a result, readily reinforce Taylor's artistic integration of his images of the serpent (great dragon, devil), the grave (death), darkness, and the deep (sin) in “Meditation 1.19,” especially in terms of the circular theological pattern biblically established in Genesis and Revelation. The sway of the rebellious sons of God in Genesis will be supplanted by the triumph of the Herculean Son of God and of the restored Adamic sons of God (Revelation 2:18, 21:7). (53-54)

Taylor thus mediates Classical and Christian stories as cultural and historical artifacts that speak to his present poetic moment, a creative moment that closes the distance between the account of the fall in Genesis and the account of redemption in Revelation. Taylor's complex patterning of Scriptural and mythical references in “Meditation 1.19” shows that it is within the power of the poet to collapse the distance between disparate cultural and historical referents, a poetical-rhetorical move warranted not only by Scriptural prophesy, but also by typological interpretation, a conventional hermeneutical practice among Puritan bible readers.

What might otherwise be interpreted as unlicensed use of pagan myth gets elevated to the status of a type, therefore, which carries symbolic import for the Christian poet and bible reader. Puritans thus licensed uses of pagan writing by much the same logic Augustine had used. Scheick writes, for example, that

The pagans of antiquity, Puritans like Taylor believed, had read the Book of Nature by the limited light of their corrupted reason, specifically by means of scientia; and these pagans, Puritans also believed, had heard Old Testament stories in distorted versions. As a result, Puritan divines thought that in some
fundamental sense pagan myths and legends reflect truth in disguised form. So, Puritan ministers maintained, when pagan stories were explicated in biblical terms, the resultant readings were not inventions but discourses of disguised versions of Old Testament types adumbrating the New Testament antitype. (51)

Taylor effectively closes the end-points of the Christian hermeneutic circle by employing the rhetoric of prophesy-and-fulfillment. The highly referential nature of his poetry gives texture to the progression of historical time, which otherwise binds the poet in its plodding, prosaic, syntactical regularity. Precisely where critics read elusive stylistic irregularities in Taylor’s poetry, then, Scheick reads highly complex, but essentially cohesive allusive strategies designed to bend fallen, limited language to meet redemptive, revelatory language. Or as Scheick articulates both the scope and conscious intention of Taylor’s complicated system of intercultural and intertextual references,

[T]his complex and remarkable concealed aesthetic design in “Meditation 1.19” indicates . . . [that] Taylor was certainly interested in disclosing emblems (actually fashioning them, in our twentieth-century view). In no sense can his management of the inverted arch in this poem [in which grave pit of sin, death, and hell becomes the celestial arch of redemption, live, and heaven] be read as an unenergetic rehearsal of a worn-out pattern lacking in tension. Nor can the imagery be rooted in this aesthetic design be dismissed as rapid proliferations, free-associative in nature rather than coherent in design. Nor should the imagery in this poem be read merely as a form of “sport[ing] with drastically incongruent ways of naming” [as John Gatta argues in Gracious Laughter: The Meditative Wit of Edward Taylor]. The aesthetic design of “Meditation 1.19” is the work of
Edward Taylor, a poet nervously hesitating over and playing at the logonic site where eternal definition and temporal meanings (the corrupted dispersion of divine denotation) intertwine . . . Taylor knew that the function of art of a humble poet is not to construct a maypole-like monument or a Tower of Babel representing the artist’s prideful self-idolatry, but to conceal human art: to disguise human artfulness by revealing within it the hidden definitive (emblematic) artistry of the Logos. This is the poet we have yet to appreciate even after more than fifty years of having encountered his verse. Although Taylor in “Meditation 1.19” . . . penned [his] intricate poem for the attention of the divines mind, does this excuse us, as literary critics, from the perhaps Herculean labor of encountering the meditations as artistic texts designed, like emblems, to be read? (66-67)\(^{170}\)

Scheick notes a “self-fashioning” impulse implied in Taylor’s aesthetic designs, which he ascribes to a kind of Christian “sprezzatura” through which Taylor hides himself and his art underneath his verses, but Scheick does so in order to rescue Taylor’s poetry from critical appraisals that it is “unoriginal” in its dense allusions to Scriptural types, “confused” in its mixture of metaphorical correspondences, or otherwise stylistically “inept” in its free-associative logic. Scheick is interested in the latent creative energies of Taylor’s meditation, particularly how Taylor harnesses these creative energies to produce referentially intricate verse using otherwise conventional figures.

\(^{170}\) In his essay “A Decorum of Imperfection,” Charles Mignon cites Norman Grabo’s assessment that to read Taylor’s poetry properly, critics must revise their methods—“that the full meaning of [his poems’] terms is not contained in [any one poem], but draws from the entire body of Taylor’s writing, including his prose” (554). Grabo therefore suggests that Taylor’s wordplay is both intertextual and self-referential, in that, his poems refer to both the Scriptures and his own writings.
Scheick concludes that it is an integral strategy of Taylor’s poetics to use discordant figures, tropes and allusions in the construction of individual lines, which yield more profound harmonies when they are interpreted more holistically and holily within the context of entire meditations. Raymond Craig moves beyond the individual meditations to explain the “peculiar elegance” of Taylor’s intertextual and self-referential style across the meditations. Craig bases his reading of Taylor’s style in his essay “The ‘Peculiar Elegance’ of Edward Taylor’s Poetics” on a distinctly Puritan poetics, which he traces first to John Cotton’s admonition to readers “in both his preface to and important treatise on the Bay Psalm Book, *Singing of the Psalms, a Gospel Ordinance.* In the text, but especially in the treatise,” Craig argues,

Cotton demonstrates a sophisticated literary sensibility through a series of dichotomous distinctions—distinctions between “Spiritual elegancies” and “artificial elegancies,” spiritual gifts and God-given gifts of “Nature and Art,” the right use of these gifts to produce spiritual songs and the implied incorrect use of God-given gifts in the production of “drunken songs” and “wanton sonnets,” and “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” fit for public performance and spiritual songs fit for private devotion. (69-70)

Craig suggests that in his treatise on the Bay Psalm Book, Cotton is keenly aware of the *propriety* of translation—not only the target language’s ability to capture some sense of the source text’s spirit and style, or rather spirit in its style, but also the uses to which that translation might be put. As Craig points out, Cotton deemed “Nature and Art” God-given gifts, which must be both rightly used and used in the proper setting. This view warrants Cotton and the other translators’ use of art, whereby Craig discovers both “a literary sensibility and a sophisticated understanding of biblical poetics” in their English rendering of the Hebrew psalms. And, again, Cotton’s appeal
in his preface to the Bay Psalm Book registers a concern with the propriety of the style: “The psalmes are penned in such verses as are suitable to the poetry of the Hebrew language, and not in the common style of such other bookes of the old Testament as are not poeticall” (qtd. in Craig 70).171

Craig focuses on Cotton’s preface to and treatise on the Bay Psalm Book to show that the literary quality of Puritan poetry has been largely misunderstood. Craig observes that even Cotton’s contemporaries expected to find “smooth” and “elegant” phrasing in Cotton and the other translators’ English, which implies a literary sensibility in the Puritan reader that Cotton felt needed admonishment: “If therefore the verses are not alwayes so smooth and elegant as some may desire or expect; let them consider that Gods Altar needs not our polishings” (qtd. in Craig 71). Craig notes that Cotton’s concern with style also gets registered in the writings of other Protestants, who deal with the “peculiar elegance” of the Scriptures: “The translators of King James Bible, for example, observed the fullness and perfection of the Scriptures and, despite considerable license in their translations, felt that the Word was not altered (although considerable discussion of the problems of phrasing and style appears in the prefatory remarks).”172 Or, continues Craig, as exegete Benjamin Keach writes concerning the “peculiar elegance” of the Scriptures in his preface to Tropologia, it is the “royal descent, or divinity of the Scriptures” that explains the “Spirit of God speaking in them” and “that extraordinary and inimitable style wherein they are written”: “The style of the sacred Scripture is singular, and has peculiar properties, not elsewhere to be found: its simplicity is joined with majesty, commanding the veneration of all serious men” (qtd. in Craig 72). Craig claims that both Cotton and Keach can

171 My emphasis.
172 See Chapter 4, “Uneasy Authorities: The Rhetoric of Propriety in Early Modern Translations of the Holy Scriptures.” I am indebted to Craig’s reference here to the KJV translators’ preface, in which I read a concern with both the propriety of translating the Scriptures (i.e. the process or method of translation) and the propriety of the translation (i.e. the product and uses of translation).
be said to have traced their “concept of special elegance, or eloquence, of the Scripture not to
Paul but to Augustine in the Confessions [and] . . . [i]n De Doctrina Christiana,” respectively, in
which

Augustine [confesses], That the Scriptures seemed rude and unpolished to him, in
comparison of Cicero’s adorned style, because he did not then understand its
interiora, or inward beauty; but when he was converted to Christianity, declared,
That when he understood them, no writing appeared more wise or eloquent.
(Keach, Tropologia xv; qtd. in Craig 72)

And Augustine later articulates in De Doctrina Christiana what it is exactly that he finds so
moving about the Scriptures’ “peculiar elegance”:

It is not the qualities which [sacred] writers have in common with the heathen
orators and poets that give me such unspeakable delight in their eloquence; I am
more struck with admiration at the way in which, by an eloquence peculiarly
their own, they so use this eloquence of ours that it is not conspicuous either by
its presence or its absence. (127; qtd. in Craig 72)

It is this hidden quality of the Scriptures’ eloquence, elegance, or artistry that Augustine, the KJV
translators, Cotton, Keach, and Taylor found so fascinating, and it is this hidden quality that
moved each of these writers to celebrate the Scriptures on its own terms rather than invent terms
of their own. They shared a common recognition that any “artificial elegancies” of their own
design were fruitless because woefully inadequate, and therefore needless. Once more, as Cotton
writes in his preface to the Bay Psalm Book, “Gods Altar needs not our polishings.”
Like Scheick in *Design in Puritan American Literature*, Craig contextualizes Edward Taylor’s poetry in relation to the Scriptures and the long tradition of Protestant commentary on the Scriptures’ style in order to show that Taylor’s style *coheres* despite critical assessments to the contrary. Craig reevaluates Taylor’s poetry in light of central place the psalms hold in Puritan poetics, and by extension, the central place Taylor’s poetry holds in early American literature, a literature very much characterized by its dependence on the Protestant exegetical tradition. Craig argues that “To ignore the emphasis that all the psalters place on the right use of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs is to ignore both an explicit concern for art and the foundation of Puritan poetics—and, of course, Edward Taylor’s poetics” (69). This Puritan concern for “principled art”—proper style and its right use—extends, of course, to Taylor’s poetry, as Craig argues later in this essay when he writes that

I extend these arguments by suggesting that Taylor’s use of the Scripture’s “peculiar eloquence” extends to the nonhistorical, tropological use of the Word. The study of biblical poetics as understood by Cotton and others demonstrates that Taylor’s inconsistent imagery and “roughness” may be understood as a coherence of spiritual significance—revealed not through reference to a textually bound biblical object or event but instead through the spiritual meaning of scriptural word and phrase in the new context.

Craig notes that Hammond’s term “biblical metatext” in his book *Sinful Self, Saintly Self* certainly offers a way to conceptualize the “coherence of spiritual significance” Craig and other critics find in Taylor’s tropological (and typological) uses of Scripture, but Craig focuses more specifically on the sophisticated intertextual patterns Taylor achieves in his poetry, patterns that at once reveal
Taylor’s inventiveness in using and anxieties about *rightly* using Scriptural tropes and types to create new meaning in new contexts.

As both Scheick and Craig observe, Taylor’s intertextual play (re-creation?) suggests tropo- and typological correspondences beyond the Scriptural, including references that might otherwise be considered idolatrous or prideful, such as his referencing of pagan myth or his referencing of his own writing. To label Taylor “self-fashioning,” however, perhaps overstates the coherent design both of these commentators see in his poetry. Although Scheick and Craig reach the issue of coherence in Taylor’s poetry by strikingly different routes, both read the discursive limits with which Puritan poets had to “come to terms” as a creative opportunity rather than a constraint. Both critics suggest, and Scheick especially, that Taylor developed poetical and rhetorical strategies—various tropes and types among them—for dealing with the limitations of fallen language. Scheick concludes in “The Winding Sheet of Meditative Verse,” for instance, that Taylor employs these tropological and typological strategies to loosen his lines “from the bond[s] of Bablic twisted rhetoric” in order to achieve symbolic-scriptural and spiritual communion with the divine:

> These underlying features [i.e. the symbolic patterning of Taylor’s poetry] not only echo the prophecies of scripture but also hint to God that this particular singer (poet) perhaps possesses a certain latent ability that might be especially useful to the deity. By artistically managing an underlying, hidden coalescence of imagery in terms of an ultimate divine circularity and, as well, by integrating this imagery and pattern through a central denotative emblem, the poet seeks God’s attention. Taylor’s meditation intimates that he tries to unfold (disclose) the serpent’s ultimate defeat at the end of the sinuous windings of history and, at the
same time, that he tries to unravel his own song to God from the bond of Bablic
twisted rhetoric, the shroudlike product of the dashing out of the Adamic eye of
reason by the serpent. (65)

This intertextual disclosure that critics see in the latent patterning of Taylor’s poetry suggests that
the poetry registers Taylor’s extreme sensitivity to and perhaps even frustration with the
constraints imposed on man by the limits of his understanding—the serpent’s “dashing out of the
Adamic eye of reason.” It is in complex patterning and intertextual play that Taylor seems to be
striving with, and within, an already-fallen discourse.

Since Taylor’s poetry was discovered in 1936, then, scholars have debated its place
alongside the poetry of his English and American near contemporaries. Among those first
generation scholars interested in the stylistic and generic propriety of Taylor’s poetry are Charles
Mignon and Karl Keller. Mignon argues that Taylor’s poetry evinces not just the struggle of the
religious poet to praise God rightly, but the struggle of a Calvinist to persist in his praise of God
even though he knows his praise is insufficient, because fallen. Part of the Calvinist poet’s calling
is to patiently endure and continue to praise God despite its insufficiency. Mignon calls this
imperative of the Calvinist poet, which Taylor especially realizes in his Preparatory Meditations,
a “decorum of imperfections,” and it this paradoxical sense of decorum, argues Mignon, that
prevents a fair and proper comparison between Taylor’s poetry the poetry of his near
contemporaries, the poetry of the English metaphysicals being the most stylistically similar to
Taylor’s own. Karl Keller, on the other hand, reveals that Taylor’s poetry is not as “provincial” as
critics have generally tried to make it. Taylor’s education at Harvard indeed prepared him for his
calling to the ministry in the “wilderness” congregation at Westfield; however, his prolific
publication reveals his continued relevance and connection to Cambridge and Boston, the cultural
centers of the New World and, through them, to Old World London, even after his remove to Westfield. Perhaps his comparison to the English metaphysical poets bears out after all.

Second generation scholars continue the first generation’s work of recovering Taylor’s poetry. Mason Lowance, for instance, draws on Perry Miller’s seminal Puritan intellectual history, *The New England Mind*, to refute Charles Feidelson’s charge that Puritans’ “crude” aesthetic principles and limited literary imaginations led to the slow formation of the American literary heritage. Reminiscent of Migon’s work, Lowance approaches the peculiarities of Puritan aesthetics as a “language problem,” arguing that critics ought to properly historicize Puritan poetics if they are to understand the “rigors” of the Puritan aesthetic. For Lowance, “rigor” is not the ugly word Feidelson would make it; rather, it reveals less the rigidity of the Puritan imagination bound by biblical rhetoric than its inventiveness within the bounds of biblical rhetoric, a rhetoric of typology and, in rare cases, allegory. Like Lowance, Jeffery Hammond is interested in the rhetoric of Puritan aesthetic imagination, but extends Lowance’s argument to the “rhetorical situation” of Puritan poetry. Hammond contends that “Puritan literary experience cannot be divorced from Puritan religious experience.” For Puritan readers who did not distinguish aesthetic response from spiritual response, the seemingly formulaic use of Scripture rhetoric in Puritan poets’ “relentlessly biblical message and diction” did not demonstrate “a failure of poetic invention” (8). In fact, says Hammond, Puritan readers’ keen familiarity with Scripture rhetoric rendered them fit readers for identifying poets’ subtle uses of biblical diction to relate both common and unique spiritual experiences. That Puritan poetry details these experiences, continues Hammond, permits modern readers’ recovery of the “experiential dimension” of Puritan life related in these texts, an experiential dimension that “stems ultimately from biblical definitions of literary art and personal identity” (8). Hammond’s particular interest in Taylor’s poetry, and especially his *Preparatory Meditations*, largely results from Taylor’s
writing not just for a real audience, as he readies himself in his poetic reflections to deliver sermons on the Lord’s Supper his Westfield congregation, but also for what Hammond calls his “Christic audience,” the ideal reader to whom Taylor speaks in his meditations.

Adopting similar rhetorical approaches to Puritan poetics are, finally, William Scheick and Raymond Craig, who are both interested in the “peculiar aesthetic” character of Taylor’s poetry generally and, in particular, Taylor’s *Preparatory Meditations*. Scheick argues that the apparent dissonance in Taylor’s meditations—more precisely, his mixing of images and metaphors in certain of his lines—actually reveals a deeper coherence that can be traced to Taylor’s artistry, but only after the lines apparent dissonance is properly contextualized within a particular poem and the poem properly contextualized in the Scriptures’ overall message of “divine circularity.” Taylor thus reproduces in small the rhetoric of God’s Word: first, humanity’s apparent disconnection in and from creation—that is, man’s inability to properly read the Book of Nature—for which God serves as origin and end; and second, Christians’ grappling with faith and doubt during the unfolding of God’s divine providence as articulated in the Scriptures’ rhetoric of prophesy and fulfillment. Scheick concludes that the “surface disorder” of Taylor’s meditations thus reveals beyond this “Bablic twisted rhetoric” “subtle coalescences” that disclose the “artistry of God revealed in Genesis and Revelation” (65). Scheick focuses especially on Taylor’s uses of the Scriptures’ own typological rhetoric to achieve complex intercultural and intertextual patterns in his poetry. With his intercultural allusions Taylor shows the ubiquity of God’s divine light across all creation, its presence even in those cultures otherwise considered “pagan.” With his intertextual or typological allusions Taylor reminds himself and his readers of the Word’s fulfillment in Christ’s incarnation, death, resurrection and second coming.
Similar to Scheick’s interest in Taylor’s use of the Scriptures’ typological rhetoric to create complex intertextual patterns, Raymond Craig examines the rhetoric of John Cotton’s admonition to readers in both his preface to the Bay Psalm Book and his treatise on the Book, *Singing of the Psalms, a Gospel Ordinance* alongside the “rhetoric” of Taylor’s *Preparatory Meditations* to reveal the “biblical poetics” motivating Taylor’s stylistic peculiarities. Craig concludes that it is the Scriptures’ inconspicuous eloquence, elegance and artistry, which becomes increasingly apparent to readers as they grow in the faith and to which Cotton appeals when he admonishes readers of the Bay Psalm Book that the Scriptures’ perfect eloquence requires no human ornament: “Gods Altar,” writes Cotton, “needs not our polishings.” As with Scheick, Craig is interested in the “peculiar eloquence” of Puritans’ “biblical poetics” and, more specifically, in Taylor’s use of tropo- and typological rhetoric to achieve complex intertextual patterns across his poetry, patterns that simultaneously evince Taylor’s artistic and inventive use of the Scripture’s rhetoric, as well as Taylor’s anxiety about the propriety of his paraphrastic impulse in praising God through the Scriptures’ rhetoric.

This paraphrastic impulse also attends all literary scholarship and positions me to admit the debt I owe to these commentators’ various conclusions about Edward Taylor’s stylistic peculiarities. As the next chapter will demonstrate, I too examine Taylor’s style, but not just through the lens of Puritans’ biblical poetics. I extend this argument by examining the biblical poetics, which is also a “biblical rhetoric,” present in Taylor’s *Preparatory Meditations* as evidence of Taylor’s relentless search for a rhetoric of propriety. The meditations’ “peculiar style,” which critics trace to his use of the Scriptures’ tropo- and typological rhetoric to achieve complex intertextual patterns, I interpret as Taylor’s search for a language that will close the metaphorical distance between him and God, through Christ. Taylor meditates on the ritual of communion, discovering the sacrament to be rich in metaphorical correspondences for both his
poetic self and his preacherly self. In his poetry, Taylor dramatizes the Lord’s Supper that he might communicate with his God, incarnated in Christ. He approaches the Lord’s Supper as one of the Lord’s guests whose desire to commune with his Lord conflicts with his anxieties about the propriety of his joining the table—his unworthiness to share the Lord’s table, his crude appearance and manners compared to the divine angelic guests, and his rude language that improperly sounds the profound gratitude of his soul.

Also in these reflections, Taylor envisions himself in the Lord’s Temple—the tent of the sanctuary—imagining himself as a modern-day Levite administering the sacrifice that is, at once, the bread of life that is the central symbol of the Lord’s Supper, the blood of the lamb of God, whose imminent sacrifice the sacrament is designed to represent and celebrate, and the Word of God which Christ realized in his incarnation and will fulfill in his second coming. On a stylistic level, Taylor’s poetry thus achieves a remarkable number of symbolic correspondences that are already present in the ritual, upon which he reflects in his Preparatory Meditations. That Taylor prepares himself as minister of the sacrament and deliverer of the Word to his congregation renders his concern with stylistic propriety also a concern with rhetorical propriety. Taylor’s meditations upon communion with the Lord as the social-spiritual substance of the Puritan community renders his concern with both stylistic propriety in his poetry and rhetorical propriety in his preaching finally a concern with social and religious propriety: the propriety of his place as the spiritual center of the Westfield community and the propriety of his place as one of the Lord’s earthly ministers. I theorize in this chapter that Taylor’s poetic “vision” has its roots in the ancient Greeks’ understanding of propriety as the act of rendering something conspicuous or making it appear before the eyes, an active-passive dynamic that precisely describes the vocation the

173 In his “dinner guest” imagery, Taylor plays upon the Greek word for angel—ἀγγέλος—meaning “messenger” or “minister.” The word has divine connotations only in Scripture.
preacher-poet as God’s messenger on earth. The paradoxical purpose of the preacher-poet with which Taylor grapples in his Preparatory Meditations, then, is making conspicuous what God has hidden in the “peculiar eloquence” of the Scriptures. I therefore aim at a dialectical synthesis of Scheick and Craig’s readings of Taylor’s style in my own reading of Taylor’s search for a rhetoric of propriety in the Preparatory Meditations.

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Chapter 6, Part 2

“I shall thy praise under this shadow sing”:

The Propriety of Place in Edward Taylor’s Preparatory Meditations

The social-spiritual relation at the heart of the “language problem” with which Taylor wrestles demands a method to tease it out and a term to represent it. The term “prop(r)iety” proposes a method that at once speaks to the social relation in “propriety” and the spiritual relation in “piety.”174 Taylor’s poetry carries surface tensions that belie a deeper coherence, as several critics have concluded, albeit by different means. Whether basing these readings of Taylor’s poetics on the concept of a “biblical metatext,” as Jeffrey Hammond does in Sinful Self, Saintly Self, or on Taylor’s use of complex intertextual (i.e. tropo- or typological) patterning, as Scheick and Craig do in Design in Puritan American Literature and “The ‘Peculiar Elegance’ of Edward Taylor’s Poetics,” respectively, these critics all agree that Taylor’s poetry achieves coherence and texture by a complex system of referencing. Nevertheless, Taylor’s metaphorical correspondences and metonymic contiguities behave according to a “reflective logic,” which reveals both spatial and temporal separation from the very thing they would represent. Metaphor achieves a likeness where there is already difference, and types defer to some future moment of fulfillment in their antitypes. The rhetorical tensions and stylistic discordances Taylor expresses in his poetry evince a painful awareness of difference from and deferral to the object of his social

174 Because “prop(r)iety” suggests both social observances of what is fitting or appropriate and the economic observances that underwrite them, as in the word “proprietor,” Marxist dialectic is the most fitting method for reading social and political tensions latent in the religious form. The dialectical method demonstrated in this dissertation and consolidated in its conclusion is “Marxist” in its movement, if not in its political orientation.
and spiritual desires—a drama, or meditative ritual, which he must play out on a symbolic-scriptural level.

Taylor’s anxiety about, and Taylor critics’ concern with, rhetorical and stylistic propriety in his meditative poetry suggests a “rhetoric of propriety”—a concern with the propriety of social and spiritual place—that cuts across nearly every poem in his *Preparatory Meditations*. Taylor’s poetics thus begs analysis according to a clear, concise theory of propriety. In his book *The Rhetoric of Propriety*, Stephen J. McKenna traces the distinctly rhetorical concern with propriety to the ancient Greeks and the various words they used to refer to different kinds of propriety. One important conclusion McKenna draws from his archaeology of the concept in ancient Greek rhetorical thought is that each of these terms seems to carry a visual or ocular quality that suggests that propriety is *observed* in speech and action. He writes, for instance, that of the Greek words that signify “appropriateness” or “becomingness,” including *to prosekon* (that which is fit, beseeming), *harmozein* (to fit, suit), *to oikeion* (that which belongs to, is suited to, one’s own), the most common word used where stylistic propriety was intended was *to prepon* (that which appears before the eyes, or is seen conspicuously).

*To prepon* appears in several different inflections in Greek literature, spanning Homeric poetry and Greek speculative philosophy, as McKenna observes when he writes that

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175 McKenna does not cite Kenneth Burke’s critical method—“dramatism”—in his etymological analysis of propriety, but the visual and ocular quality to which he here refers suggests that Burke’s method offers a rich, dialectical way of reading “symbolic action.” As Burke points out in both *A Grammar* and *A Rhetoric of Motives*, all life is drama, which can be observed in discourse and action, and the foundation of drama is human motive. Burke’s key question—“What motivates people to speak and act in certain ways?”—certainly calls up moral and ethical considerations. Referring to Taylor’s anxiety about propriety as a social-spiritual drama that he must play out at the symbolic-scriptural level certainly warrants critical claims that Taylor’s meditative poetry symbolizes social concerns: his communion with God, his awareness of the “Christic reader,” his meditation on the biblical text of his sermon, and his preparing his congregation to approach the Lord’s Supper—itself a social-spiritual event.
The origins of *to prepon* extend to Homeric poetry, where the verb *prepein* means “to appear before the eyes,” or “to be seen conspicuously.” For example, in the Homeric Hymn *To Demeter*, Metaneira tells the goddess that “truly dignity and grace are conspicuous upon your eyes [*prepei ommasin*] as in the eyes of kings that deal justice” (2.214-15) . . . . [And, in the *Odyssey* for example,] Odysseus remarks that men are gifted unequally: One is comely, yet ineloquent, another ugly, yet gifted in speech. As for the latter, “God crowns his words with beauty, so that all may listen to [or gaze upon, *leussousin*] him with delight; he speaks in a steady voice with winning modesty, he is notable where men gather together [*meta de prepei agromenoisin*] and as he walks through the streets, all gaze upon [*eisoroosin*] him as one inspired” (8.172). (26-27)

Each of the words the Greeks used to signify appropriateness implies the appearance of propriety, but in slightly different ways. The first two words McKenna introduces—*to prosekon* (that which is fit, beseeming) and *harmozein* (to fit, suit)—suggest that the person being observed “possesses” certain characteristics that are proper to him, which lends an aesthetic quality to stylistic propriety. The third word—*to oikeion* (that which belongs to, is suited to, one’s own)—further elaborates upon the idea of “possession” to suggest that these characteristics belong to the person, that the person owns them in a “proprietary” way that implies “economic” propriety. The last word—*to prepon* (that which appears before the eyes, or is seen conspicuously)—suggests that stylistic propriety is not merely a quality or characteristic visible in the person, but also a quality or characteristic that the person presents to the viewer. “Proper” to verb *prepein*, then, is the sense that “that which is seen conspicuously” is perceived as an object before the eyes of an observer, as well as the sense that “that which appears before the eyes” is made apparent by a
speaking or acting *subject*. This subject-object dynamic contains an active-passive play of appearances, an ancient phenomenology that is inherently dialectical in its movement.

The active-passive movement implied in what McKenna calls “Homeric seeing” is at once “outwardly projective” and “self-motivated” (27), a self-image one forms by imagining himself in the eyes of others. Taylor critics like Scheick perhaps overstate this “self-fashioning” impulse in Taylor’s poetry, and yet, to understate this impulse ignores the social motive of the poetry. Much like the sacrament of approaching the Lord’s Supper, Taylor achieves a kind of ritual in his meditations whereby he attempts to close the metaphoric and metonymic distance he feels between himself and God. The Lord’s Supper serves for Taylor as a symbolic site of spiritual-scriptural communion with God, through Christ. He finds the sacrament rich in metaphorical correspondences and complex metonymic contiguities that allow him to literally see *himself* in communion with Christ, which is to say that in his meditations, Taylor imagines himself communing or conversing with Christ and represents these images in his poetry. The complex intertextual patterning Taylor achieves within and between meditations results directly from the metaphorical and metonymic richness of the sacrament itself, which is already imbued with rich symbolic meaning. In order to re-present his communion with Christ in his meditations, then, Taylor approaches the Lord’s Supper as both symbolic-spiritual site and literal event.

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176 Early in his *Preparatory Meditations*—namely, “Meditation 10” in the first series—Taylor refers to the Lord’s Supper, specifically the sacramental wine, as “a Well / Of Aqua-Vitae in the Deity” that brings the individual Christian into the Christian fold of “communion” with Christ that he might have eternal life like Christ and the saints:

But how it cam, amazeth all Communion.
Gods only Son doth hug Humanity,
Into his very person. By which Union
His Humane Veins its golden gutters ly.
And rather than my Soule should dy by thirst,
These Golden Pipes, to give me drink, did burst. (lines 13-18)

Taylor wonders about the mystery of communion, by which the communicant is brought into spiritual union with the divine, and expresses this union by physical contact: “Gods only Son doth hug Humanity, / Into his very person” (lines 14-5). Taylor’s suggestion of spiritual union by physical union associates these lines with the *Canticles*. 
A Longing Look across the Table:

Taylor’s “Looking Glass” Metaphor for Proper Social and Spiritual Communion

Taylor’s metaphorical “dining” with Christ first allows him to envision his savior and look upon his face as if he were sitting beside him at the table and breaking bread. The social motive of communion that inspires these moments in his meditations brings to mind the Canticles text in which Solomon praises Christ’s beautiful countenance. Canticles in turn calls up associations of Christ as “bridegroom” of the church and “spouse” of the individual believer, so that seated before Taylor at this table is his spiritual spouse and savior. What at first seems a convoluted mixture of metaphoric meanings reveals instead a complex, but logical patterning of intertextual—and inter-lyrical—associations that Taylor makes in his desire to commune more completely with God.177

Meditations 2.139 and 2.140 offer the clearest articulation of Taylor’s association of the Lord’s Supper with the Canticles text, taking as his source text the Canticles passage: “Like a piece of a pomegranate are thy temples within thy locks” (6:7). Taylor dramatizes in these meditations the scene of communion with Christ. He imagines Christ sitting before the believer, wooing him/her as a lover would a newly-wedded spouse. In the poem’s first stanza, Taylor sets

177 By “completely,” I refer especially to the Latin meaning of the word “perfection,” which Mignon claims in his essay “Decorum of Imperfections” is the theological impetus of the entire Preparatory Meditations—a struggle to see himself as whole or complete in Christ’s eyes. The self-projection Mignon implies in his essay places Taylor at table with Christ, in whose eyes Taylor sees an image of himself. These reflections or images in Taylor’s meditations position Christ both as model of perfection and as object with which Taylor’s poetic subject desires “[comm]union.”
this scene by setting the table of the Lord’s Supper, thus conflating “union” of communion with the marriage union of Christ and his church:

My Deare, Deare Lord, oh that my Heart was made

Thy Golden Vissell filld with Graces Wine.

Received from thy Fulness and displai’de

Even by thy spouse in her sweet Wine Cup fine

Unto thy blessed Selfe to drinke at Will.

Of her sweet Wine unto thy very fill. (lines 1-6)

The first stanza opens with reference to the Lord’s Supper, but already Taylor is weaving together symbolic associations in the sacrament with associations he is making in his reflections upon the Canticles text. For instance, he anticipates Christ’s “courting” of his spouse in the second stanza with the suggestion in the first stanza that Christ’s love will certainly be requited when its abundance fills the “Golden Vissell” of his spouse’s “Heart” so that Christ himself may drink of it. That Christ and Christian drink of the same cup suggests that, in communion, they share the same “Heart.” The second stanza trades upon the “romance” of this image, though in calling the blush of the spouse’s temples “The Seate of Modesty,” Taylor is quick to separate its spiritual and mystical associations from base and lustful associations.178

Thy Love *** in thy Spouses Countenance.

Is so deli[ghted] with her Temples State,

178 In “Meditation 140,” Taylor once more refers to the “Vitall heate and Spirits” (line 11) that “Make peart [the spouse’s] Countenance” (line 12) as a “Scarlet Maske / Of Modest blushes” (lines 17-18).
The Seate of Modesty that in’t doth glance;

Her Temples like a piece of Pomegranate

That with Arteriall blood blossom with blushes,

That in her Temples yield do spiritual flushes. (lines 7-12)

These “spiritual flushes” produced in the beloved’s face become in “Meditation 140” Christ’s “Looking Glass / Into [his beloved’s] heart wherein in cleare cleare Shapes / Appear doth Choice Humility that doth pass / Most Currant coin in Graces Markets, Mates” (lines 19-22). “Mediation 139” anticipates the association of the spouse’s temples with Christ’s “Looking Glass,” for it is Christ’s love that wells up in the beloved’s heart-cup almost to the point of bursting, and it is Christ’s blood—the blood of the Lord’s Supper—that pumps “Even from the Heart through th’Arteriall pipe” (line 16), “through th’Arteriall Gate [and] / Into the Head” (lines 21-22); and it is in the temples that “the purest blood indeed / Impregnate[s] with the working Spirits ripe. / That Warm and work the Brains they proceed” (lines 13-14). In this string of associations, then, Taylor follows the love-blood of Christ from the heart-cup of the Lord’s Supper, through the beloved’s arterial pipes and into the brain, which, once infused with the Holy Spirit, begins to think pure and modest thoughts that shape clear and proper actions. Taylor’s “pomegranate blush,” then, symbolizes social and spiritual propriety, in that, the temples of the Lord—i.e. the Christian church and beloved-believer—are the appropriate place to reflect upon Christ and the Lord’s Supper the appropriate moment for social-spiritual communion with Christ.  

179 Taylor’s sense of kairotic propriety differs from Milton’s in this regard: Taylor prepares himself for the proper time, place, and occasion for communion with God through Christ in his celebration of the Lord’s Supper in the Temple of God. Taylor’s imaginative renderings of Biblical allusions, in which he himself plays a part, all converge upon the Eucharistic celebration as the literal crux of the Scriptures’ message. Taylor tries to come to terms with the awesome gravity and sublimity of his role as minister of the rite.
Taylor’s reference to the “pomegranate blush” in “Mediation 140” as at once “a Scarlet Maske / Of Modest blushes” and a “Currant coin in Graces Markets” is also highly suggestive of social-sexual and economic propriety. The “Scarlet Maske” seemingly painted upon the beloved’s cheeks connotes impious love-making, or even prostitution, which Taylor quickly dismisses in the following line’s “Of Modest blushes.” The immodest blush and painted cheek surface once more in the next stanza, however, when Taylor refers to the pomegranate as “Currant coin in Graces Markets.” His association of the “pomegranate blush,” “painted face,” or “Face maskt” in the meditation’s final stanza with the “Currant coin [currency]” and what it might fetch in this “Market” in the meditation’s fourth stanza suggests both money-lending and body-lending, which clearly have no place in the temples. Taylor trades upon the romantic energies and desire for bodily contact that his sexual associations call to mind, but uses them instead to speak to the mysteries of spiritual union. Taylor’s modification of the blush, the market, and the temple with the words “grace,” “modesty,” “holy,” and “humility” registers his sense of propriety with which the Christian enters the temple and approaches the Lord’s Supper. Taylor signifies the “Christian without” by the prostitute’s painted face and polluted soul and the “Christian within” by the modest pomegranate blush that serves as Christ’s “looking glass.” In this way, Taylor turns the sexual metaphor into a spiritual sign, not unlike Christ overturned the money tables in the temple: The temples ought to be reserved for spiritual exchanges.

Taylor’s reference to the beloved’s “temples” as Christ’s “Looking Glass” implies the act of reflection in which Taylor is engaging in his meditation. The physical place of the temples on the side of the head signifies at once the physical blood that brings the blush to the lover’s face and the blood of Christ, whose sacrifice shows the extent of divine love for fallen humanity. The

Milton prepares himself and his audience “fit . . . though few” for the proper time, place, and occasion of Christ’s second coming. Milton’s rhetoric patiently awaits reunion with Christ rather than communion with Christ.
physical place of the temples as the site of this sacrifice signifies in turn that the lover is both Christian church (the temple) and holy communicant, and the blood coursing through the temples represents the wine that symbolizes Christ’s sacrifice and the lover’s spiritual communion with the divine. The wine itself suggests both the color of blush—and perhaps even the drinker’s blush—which returns the reader from spiritual to physical associations and prepares him for the “temples” as Christ’s “Looking Glass,” which signifies Christ’s looking upon the temples of his beloved and finding there his own reflection, much like the love sonneteer’s looking into the eyes of his beloved and seeing his own reflection in miniature staring back at him. This physical association of the “temples” as Christ’s “Looking Glass” also carries an ocular quality that calls up the active-passive movement implied in McKenna’s “Homeric seeing,” a term he uses to articulate his etymological understanding of the word “propriety” in the Greek verb prepein, meaning “to be seen conspicuously.” The definition suggests a subject-object relation—the object being “that which is seen” and the subject being “that which makes what is seen conspicuous to the seer.”

180 William Scheick corroborates this active-passive movement in his essay “Edward Taylor’s Optics.” Scheick contends that “a distinct pattern emerges in Taylor’s use of...two different optical theories informing the Preparatory Meditations. This pattern not only permits two opposing optical theories to coexist in Taylor’s poetry, it also alerts us to be more sensitive to the often elusive threads of continuity beneath the surface chaos of his poems” (234). Scheick here refers to “the faculty of reason as the eye of the soul” (234), and discusses over the course of the essay how Taylor works with this image in his verse, “where the postlapsarian condition of the eye of reason is presented as a state of blindness” (235). Scheick claims that Taylor draws on incongruent optical theories “concerning the source of light in the process of vision,” theories that can be labeled “Aristotelian” and “Platonic,” respectively. Scheick shows that Taylor preferred the active, “Platonic” theory of extramission to the passive, “Aristotelian” theory of reflection: “The Aristotelian concept of optics,” Scheick writes, “maintained that light rays derive from luminous objects and that vision is the result of the reflection of the images of these objects upon the watery surface of the eye” (237). Opposed to this concept is “The Platonic concept, which...held that the eye is the source of light, that vision results from the impact of ocular beams emanating from the eye” (236). Scheick concludes that “Meditation 1.16” shows Taylor’s best integration of otherwise incongruent optical theories. This poem reveals that “For Taylor the Aristotelian optical theory of light’s reflection in the eye described the postlapsarian condition of the otherwise blind eye of the soul; the Platonic optical theory of light’s emission from the eye pertained to the fully regenerated state of the eye of the soul, a condition recalling Adam’s and Christ’s capacity for spiritual light” (240). See also Martin Jay’s Downcast Eyes, in which Jay discusses the “ocular-centric bias” in Greek philosophical thought. This “ocular-centric bias” in Greek philosophical thought also suggests the visual basis of the Greek’s understanding of rhetorical or stylistic propriety, which Stephen J. McKenna traces to the Greek verb prepein.
Taylor’s wordplay with the “temples” as site of Christian love implies that love originates and returns to Christ through the Christian: The heart-cup from which both Christian and Christ drink is filled with Christ’s superabundant grace. The union implied in communion Taylor articulates as Christ’s arms “hug[ging] Humanity, / Into his very person” (1.10). The “lover’s blush” marking the believer’s temples is the “Looking Glass” through which Christ looks into the Christian’s heart and sees there his own reflection. At once “self-motivated” and “outwardly projective,” propriety as prepein—as “that which is seen conspicuously”—is the metaphorical “heartbeat” of Puritan community. In the image of the “Looking Glass,” Taylor reflects upon the ritual of the Lord’s Supper and the spiritual communion it symbolizes as the “heart” of the church, sending the blood of grace to each of its “members.” Of course, the blood returns to the heart, much like Christ sees his reflection in the heart of the Christian. With the church at the center of the Christian community, and the sacrament of communion at the center of church practice, it is no surprise that Taylor meditated—or reflected—so deeply upon his approach to the Lord’s Supper. The subject-object movement implied in Christ’s suffusion of grace upon the members of the church Taylor also mirrors in his preparation to administer the Lord’s Supper. Taylor acts as minister of this ritual of grace, but can only do so insofar as he is acted upon as a recipient of God’s grace.

The tropes and types that Taylor shapes to give expression to spiritual anxieties and tensions also give texture—depth, breadth, and pattern—to his poetry, and his intertextual patterning is at moments so complex that any attempt to represent it ends in the vertiginous experience of being turned and turned about. One finds in Taylor’s poetry a paraphrastic impulse that suggests Taylor patterned his poetry upon a literal “transcription” of the Scriptures, a crossing and re-crossing of the Scriptures—a text already so self-referential that the verse patterns
Taylor designs in his poetry very often produce “knots.” Taylor’s intertextual patterns register inter- and intratextual tensions, moments that Taylor uses to give expression to the body-mind-spirit dialectic that underwrites the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. The social-spiritual motive at the heart of the ritual, to which Taylor gives expression in “Meditation 139” and Meditation 140, reveals the dialogical character of communion. Christ and communicant meet in (or over) the bread and wine—symbols of Christ’s body and blood—which Christ sacrificed so that he and his church (spouse) might unite in a single body, mind, and spirit. Keeping the dialogical character of communion in mind, then, Taylor literally discourses with the Scriptures, which he takes as the Word-made-flesh in Christ.

Reflections of the “Looking Glass”:

The Rhetorical Propriety of Taylor’s Discourse on Christ

Taylor’s discoursing with the Word-as-Christ (i.e. his running to and fro about, his transcribing of, his crossing and re-crossing of the Scriptures) adds a “layering” effect to the poetry that is dialectical in its texture and movement. In his meditation on John 15:5, “Without me yee can do nothing,” for instance, Taylor discourses on the “link” between himself and God, through Christ. He opens the meditation thinking through his spiritual relation to the sovereign God:

My Blessed Lord, that Golden Link that joyns

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181 Taylor is fond of the metaphor, using it in several of his poems to call attention to the inadequacy of his metaphors, which tie him up in knots.
My soule, and thee, out blossoms on’t this spruice

Peart Pronoun: MY more spiritous than wines,

Rooted in Rich Relation, Graces sluce. (2.35, lines 1-4)

The grace that waters Taylor’s “spruce” soul—that “Golden Link[ed]” sluice gate which carries surplus grace by feeding this tree with surplus water—he owes directly to the Spirit of God. Taylor’s suggestion in these lines is that his spruce soul would dry up at the roots, wither and die were it not “Rooted in [the] Rich [soil of] Relation” to God, upon whose mercy and bounty his soul depends. Taylor’s debt to and dependence upon God’s mercy forces him to question himself as “proprietor” of his own soul, and he expresses the thought in the double entendre “spruice,” by which he means “evergreen tree,” whose life is rooted in its relation to God and whose spiritual growth is continually fed by the flow of God’s grace, and “stylishly smart or neat.” This second meaning of “spru[i]ce” of course hinges on the line’s enjambment, a syntactical swing in meaning, if not in sense. Read alongside “pe[a]rt,” meaning “boldly forward in speech or behavior,” “spru[i]ce” changes from noun to coordinate adjective modifying Taylor’s use of the “Pronoun: MY,” which becomes an impropriety in several senses: Taylor questions whether he might pass off his use of the pronoun as stylistic embellishment, a small grammatical extravagance he allows himself. The stylistic impropriety risks offense, however, because it is impertinent and presumptuous. As this seemingly small stylistic slip slides into social impropriety, Taylor reflects upon economic propriety as the material relations that underwrite and inform social relations, including his relationship to God, for on this material relationship depends the life, growth and movement of his soul, mind and body.

Taylor’s conclusion about this seemingly small stylistic and social impropriety moves him to reflect much more broadly upon the paradox of propriety that underwrites the Calvinist’s
spiritual condition. The discursive turn Taylor makes in the second half of the poem, in which he reflects upon the import and implications of his use of the “Spruice Peart Pronoun: MY,” is indicative of the dialectical patterning he designs in other of his poems and the dialectical movements he makes across poems in each series and between adjacent poems in a single series. Taylor observes in “Meditation 35” what critics have generally noted about his poetry—that the complex patterning and movement of his verses risk tying one in “knots.” But this is Taylor’s intention all along. How else is one to represent the “knotty” logical problem—the paradox of propriety—that is the Calvinist’s spiritual condition but by mixing metaphors and designing verses whose syntactic thread loops back upon itself to form knots. Taylor admits that to praise God properly, he must first acknowledge His sovereignty, for it is only by the Spirit and grace of God that Taylor’s lines have any effect at all—the paradox being that if the force, spirit, and effect of Taylor’s words, which are his work, always-already come from God, then his place in the poem and in Creation is merely to close the circuit of superabundant grace.

Taylor meditates upon the mediation that Christ’s sacrifice made possible, comparing the sacrificial blood to a mantle at once clothing him with mercy and protecting him from God’s awful justice, and concluding from this comparison that the mantle is too rich to represent in the homely metaphors that dress his praise. To Christ he says, “Thy Ware to me’s so rich, should my Returns / Be packt in sparkling Metaphors, out still’d . . . all would bee / As packs of guilded Non-Sense unto thee” (lines 13-14, 17-18). The words that are Taylor’s work can never outdo the Word that was the work of Christ; in fact, Taylor’s words and work have no effect without the Word and work of Christ. The image of the palimpsest that Taylor offers whenever he reflects upon the poetical-rhetorical effect of his own writing shows that his writing is always underwritten by the Scripture-Word, the Christ-as-flesh and bread of life that symbolizes Christ’s
sacrifice in the Lord’s Supper. The syntactical pattern of “Meditation 35” reveals the paradox of the Calvinist spiritual condition in its poetical-rhetorical effect:

Here is a Living Spring of power that tapt

All-doing influences hence do flow.

What we have done undone us hath. (as’t hapt)

That we without thee now can nothing do

We cannot do what do we should. (in Summ)

Nor undo what undoes us, by us undone. (lines 31-36)

Much like his “spru[i]ce” “Rooted in [the] Rich [soil of] Relation” to God, Taylor opens this meditation reflecting upon grace as a “Living Spring of power” that nourishes the Christian’s soul, provides the energy, and thus brings about the effects of all its good movements. The appeal to propriety here is clear: Only by God’s grace, which is effected by Christ’s sacrifice, can the Christian do anything good. Christ’s doing mediates the Christian’s doing, thus undoing what Adam “un-did” by his “undo doing”:

We have our Souls undone. Can’t undo this.

We have Undone the Law, this can’t undo:

We have undone the World, when did amiss.

We can’t undoe the Curse that brings in Woe.

Our Undo-Doings can’t undo, it’s true.
We can’t our Souls, and things undone, renew. (lines 37-42

Taylor’s syntactical play in these lines represents the logical complexity of Calvinist doctrine. The covenant of works established between God and Adam in Eden promised life for obedience, so that when Adam disobeyed God’s command, he broke both the Law and the covenant of works. Justice stipulates that Adam and all his progeny deserve death for disobedience. Taylor reflects upon the God’s justice as a “Curse,” which man cannot undo by good works, having destroyed this possibility when Adam broke the covenant of works. Adam’s breaking of the covenant of works between man and God is, for Taylor, the supreme impropriety or “Undo-doing” of man.

By Adam’s disobedience, man can no longer fulfill his part of the covenant, and so he has lost ownership of the means of procuring God’s grace. The fall prepares for the possibility of the Christ-redeemer who will “renew” the terms of the contract in the covenant of grace, through which Christ, by his doing (his sacrifice), fulfills the covenant of works on man’s behalf:

Without thee wee can nothing do, it’s sure.

Thou sadst the same. We find thy saying true.

Thou canst do all things: all amiss canst cure.

Undo our Undo-doing: make all new.

Thou madst this World: dost it thy play-house keep.

Wherein the stars themselves do play Hide-and-Seek. (lines 43-48)

Christ, as an advocate and substitute for man, serves as symbol of propriety, which Taylor represents in the syntactical turns he makes in this meditation: man can nothing do because of the
first man’s “undo”-doing, and so man is in need of a doer who will renew what man undid—or as Taylor suggests in the double negative, undo what man undid. The double negative offers a return, which is implied in “conversion” as turning around, to the terms of the original covenant of works, of which man is beneficiary, but only because Christ’s sacrifice—his doing—has satisfied man’s part. Christ’s redemption of man’s debt ratifies man’s fallen works, which only carry redemptive force through man’s faith in Christ.

Christ’s sacrificial work serves as a historical expression for fallen man’s redemptive work under the terms of the covenant of grace. Adam’s breaking of the covenant was inside of time, so Christ’s sacrifice renewing the covenant is also inside of time. In this meditation, however, Taylor also proposes that the sacrifice becomes the historical fulfillment of the eternal covenant of grace between God and his elect: “Thou canst do all things: all amiss canst cure. / Undo our Undo-doing: make all new. / Thou madst this World” (lines 45-47). Taylor’s reference to Genesis and the beginning of human history in the line “Thou madst this World” and to Revelation and the end of human history in the line “make all new” resituates the fall and the promise of redemption as already present in the eternal mind of God.182 Taylor suggests in his

182 In his Annotations upon the five books of Moses, Henry Ainsworth identifies Christ as the “seed” that would undo the serpent’s work in the garden and thus usher in the covenant of grace. The prophesy argues that Christ’s redemptive work is eternal in that his historical sacrifice cleanses humanity of the stain of original sin for all time. The reference to Christ as “seed” appears in Genesis 3:15, “And I will put enmity betweene thee and the woman, and betweene thy seed and her seed: Hee, shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heele.” Ainsworth has much to write concerning the “seed” as Moses’s “promise of a redeemer”:

thy seed and her seed:] that is, thy posterity and hers. Seed, is often used for children: by the Serpents seed are meant not only those venomous beasts, which have enmity with mankind: but also wicked men, called serpents, generations of vipers, and children of the Devill, Matth. 23.33. I John 3.10. By womans seed, is meant (in respect of Satan) chiefly Christ, who being God over all, blessed for ever, should come of David and Abraham, and so of Eve, according to the flesh, for she was the mother of all it implyeth Christians (the children of Christ, Heb. 2.13) who resisting the Devill stedfastly in faith, the God of peace bruiseth Satan under their feet; I Pet. 5.9. Rom. I 6.20. When promise is made concerning the seed, the faithfull parents are also included, and so on the contrary: as when Moses saith, I will multiply thy seed, Gen. 22.17. Paul alledgeth it thus, I will multiply thee, Heb. 6.14. Againe, where Moses saith, All families shall be blessed in thee, Gen. 12.3. Peter alledgeth it, they shall be blessed in thy seed, Acts 3.25. Also this word seed, is
pairing of these lines that it was God’s choice, which Milton dramatizes in his dialogue between the Son and the Father in heaven in Book III of *Paradise Lost*, either to undo all of Creation or renew the terms of His covenant with man. Milton positions the Son as advocate for man, questioning the justice of his Father’s undoing all of Creation after the fall:

[W]ilt thou thyself

Abolish thy creation, and unmake

For him, what for thy glory thou hast made?

So should thy goodness and thy greatness both

Be question’d and blasphem’d without defence. (3.162-66)

That be from thee far,

That far be from thee, Father, who art judge

Of all things made, and judgest only right. (3.153-55)

used either for a multitude, as Gen. 15.5. or for one particular person, as Gen. 21.13. and 4.25. so here it meaneth on speciall seed Christ, Gal. 3.16. This the ancient Hebrew Doctors also acknowledged, for in Thargum Jerusalem, the fulfilling of this promise is expressly referred to the last dayes, the dayes of the King Messiah. And the Mystery of original sinne, and thereby death over all, and of deliverance by Christ, R. Menachem on Lev. 25. noteth from the profound Cabbalists, in these words; So long as the spirit of uncleannesse is not taken away out of the world, the soules that come downe into the world, must needs die, for to root out the power of uncleannesse and filthinesse which the Serpent brought upon Eve. And of it be so, all the soules that are created and become unclean by that filthiness, must needs die before the comming of the Messiah . . . and at the comming of Messiah, all soules shall be consummate thenceforth. (17-18)

Ainsworth’s reference to “the last dayes” in Moses’s prophesy concerning the first days reveals the cyclical nature of Christ’s redemptive work. It is at once historical and eternal. Ainsworth’s last reference to Menachem’s commentary on *Leviticus* 25 to round out his reading of this passage is significant, for it sets up a typological relationship between the ancient Jewish rite of cleansing the body of the certain skin diseases like leprosy or cleansing the soul of sin by the blood of animal sacrifices and the cleansing of the soul of all humanity of the stain of original sin by Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. I analyze Taylor’s meditations on the typological relation between the Leviticus cleansing rite and Christ’s sacrifice below.  

See Chapter 5 “The ‘Contracted Palm’ to the ‘Open Hand’: Milton’s Presentation of Logical and Rhetorical Propriety” for a discussion of the Son’s advocacy on behalf of man.
Milton dramatizes in this dialogue between the Father and the Son Genesis 18:25, in which Abraham prays to God to spare Sodom if but a few righteous people might be found in it: “That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all he earth do right?” The appeal, “That be far from thee,” as both Abraham and Milton use it, suggests that it is unbecoming or contrary to the nature and perfection of God not to discriminate between wicked and righteous. For Milton, the Son’s line of questioning is not interrogatory, but rhetorical. He advocates for man without interrogating the Father’s sense of justice, for God cannot contradict his own decrees; instead, the Son’s rhetorical questions anticipate his own incarnation and sacrifice in expiation of man’s crime and his renewal of the covenant between man and God that man might live in Christ through the covenant of grace. Faith in Christ thus purchases man’s redemption and salvation, Christ’s sacrifice serving to “undo” man’s “Undo-doing” and renew his soul by the covenant of grace. Man can only do anything right and good, in other words, by the grace of God, which makes Taylor question from the beginning of “Meditation 35” to its end a question of whether humanity can ever take ownership of any good thought, word, or action since it results directly from God’s grace.

184 Milton certainly suggests that it is contrary to God’s perfect justice to destroy wicked and righteous alike, for the dialogue between the Father and the Son is motivated by the doctrine that God cannot contradict his own decrees: the Father articulates his own perfect justice to his Son, “Die he [man] or justice must” (3.210). This logic would undo all Creation since it was for man that the world was created, and if man die, then all Creation must. Taylor’s “Meditation 35” develops by this same logic, and, like Milton, he is interested in the sense of “unbecoming,” or impropriety, implied in man’s fall as an “undo-doing” that would unmake all Creation. Milton turns on a mere semicolon to make the transition from the Father’s expression of perfect justice to His seemingly equal expression of perfect grace: “Die he or Justice must; unless for him / Some other able, and as willing, pay / The rigid satisfaction, death for death” (3.210-12). So too does Taylor trade on the idea of “payment” in Christ’s “ownership” of man’s debt or death, but as a poetic “maker” himself, he expresses this idea in Christ’s “undoing” man’s “undo-doing,” which renews man’s contract with God and brings him back into a perfect proprietary relation in and through Christ. Man’s “unbecoming” action, in other words, to which God’s perfect justice would respond “unbecomingly” by destroying or “unbecoming” both man and the world, necessitates Christ’s “becoming” man that man might “become” whole again in his relation to God through Christ.
“At the Table” as Aaron’s Image and Christ’s Dinner Guest:

The Propriety of Place in the Presence of the Holiest of Holies

Several of Taylor’s meditations reflect on the flesh-and-blood sacrifice that anticipates Christ’s redemptive work on the cross: the burnt offering of the ancient temple given in payment for sin and the blood of the “paschal lamb” spread upon the threshold that the angel of death might pass by. Taylor is keenly aware that the blood-for-blood payment that characterizes Old Testament atonement implies economic propriety in the sacrifice as satisfaction for sin, but he is also keenly aware that the ritual of the Lord’s Supper, which symbolizes the New Testament dispensation, has nothing of the one-for-one proportion of the Old Testament sacrifice. Christ’s sacrifice serves as an antitype of all Old Testament burnt offerings and blood sacrifices, for his blood becomes payment for the sin of all mankind. In “Meditation 71” on 1 Corinthians 5:8 “Let us keep the feast, not with old leaven,” for instance, Taylor once more sets the scene of the Lord’s Supper as a feast in which he participates, but unlike “Meditation 139” and “Meditation 140,” he is not Christ’s spouse; rather, he is a diner who prays for insatiable spiritual hunger that he might be filled continually with God’s grace.\(^\text{185}\) Again, Taylor sets the metaphorical table:

Oh! Dove most innocent. O Lamb, most White.

\(^{185}\) Taylor works also with “bread of life” motif in the first series. In “Meditation 9,” for instance, Taylor references the “crumb of dust” metaphor from the Prologue so that he can associate it with the “flour” used to make the “dough” of the “bread of life.” This meditation expresses his surprise that “Christ-flour-flesh” would give life to a mere “crumb of dust.” Between “Meditation 9” and “Meditation 10,” Taylor compares the “Aurum-Vitae” of the “Boasting Spagyrist,” or alchemist, whose “Insipid Phlegm / Whose Words out Strut the Sky” (1.13-14), to the “Aqua-Vitae” of the sacramental wine that offers true eternal life to the believer.
A Spotless Male in prime. Whose blood’s the Dier

That dies the Doore posts of the Soule most bright.

Whose body all is rost at justice’s fire

And yet no bone is broken through the spit

Whereon its rost runs, spearelike, thorow it.

This Choicest Cookery is made the Feast

Where glories king doth entertain his Guests.

Whose Pastie past is Godhead: filld at least

With Venison, of Paschall Lamb the best.

All spic’d and Plumbd with Grace, and disht up right

Upon Gods Table Plate Divinely bright.

The spirituall Fare in Ordinaances, and

The Wine bled from the Holy Grape, and Vine,

That’s on the Table orderd by God’s hand

(The Supper of the Lord, the feast Divine),

Gods Gospel Priests this to that Table beare,

Where Saints are Guests: and Angells waiters are. (2.71, lines 7-24)
Taylor envisions the Lord’s Supper as “Heavens Cookery,” whose table is set with the choicest meat and drink and at whose head God is seated. God orders the angel-waiters to wait upon his saint-guests, who feed on the paschal lamb and drink from the cup of Christ—“Wine bled from the Holy Grape, and Vine” (line 20). This lamb’s blood, says Taylor, also “dies the Doore posts of the Soule most bright” (line 9), a line in which he plays with the word “dies” to reflect upon Christ as antitype of the paschal lamb: Just as the Israelites stained their door posts that the angel of death might pass by (i.e. paschal, meaning pass over, Passover) their house, so too does Christ’s blood brightly stain the “Doore posts of the [Christian saints’] Soule most bright,” a “most bright” blood stain that covers these souls’ stain of sin. The conceit also works with Christ’s body, which, in the third line of the meditation, gets “roasted at justice’s fire” as satisfaction for man’s sin. The image of the lamb roasting on the spit above the fire evokes several other images: first, Christ’s sacrifice of his body represents the animal sacrifice as atonement for sin; second, the spit that pierces the lamb’s flesh represents the nails of the cross that pierce Christ’s flesh; third, Christ physical death and spiritual descent into hell takes the place of man’s spiritual fall, which warrants hell’s fire.

Taylor weaves together images of the feast with all the metaphorical associations suggested by the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. In the meditation’s final two stanzas, for instance, Taylor imagines himself seated at the table among God and his saints, enjoying Christ’s sacrifice:

Let at this Table, Lord[,] thy servant sit.

And load my trencher with thy Paschall Lamb.

My Doore posts dy with the red blood of it.
The ‘stroying angells weapon therewith sham

And let my Faith on thy rost mutton feed

And Drinke the Wine thy holy grape doth bleed. (lines 31-36)

The “roast mutton” on which he feeds at the Lord’s table at once suggests the “bread and blood of life” of the sacrament, the paschal lamb whose blood was spread upon the Israelites’ door posts that angel of death might pass (them) over, and Christ’s physical death which destroyed death and made Taylor’s spiritual life possible.

Lord make my Faith feed on it heartily.

Let holy Charity my heart Cement

Unto thy Saints: and for a Cordiall high

Make mee a partaker of thy sacrament.

When with this Paschall bread and Wine I’m brisk

I in Sweet Tunes thy sweetest praise with twist. (lines 37-42)

In the poem’s final stanza, Taylor reveals that it is nothing in him that moves him to eat of the bread and blood of life, but rather the Spirit in him, which he identifies as “Faith” personified and animated by God’s grace. In the poem’s final couplet, Taylor turns back to the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper as symbols of the feast conceit he has imagined throughout the poem. Taylor begins to make the transition by his reference to the “Cordiall high” of the sacrament, in which he plays upon the meaning of “cordial” as at once “courteous, gracious, or warm reception”—that is, the “Cement” that adheres his heart to the other saints at God’s table. This sense of social
propriety then turns to religious piety in the next line, an interpretive turn which Taylor hinges on the second and third meanings of “cordial” as both “strong, sweetened, aromatic liquor” and “stimulating medicine.” The wine thus serves as medicine for his soul.  

186 I examine the implications of paschal wine as “cordial” in my discussion of “Plato’s Pharmacy” below. Several commentators treat Taylor’s interest in medicine and alchemy, which of course influenced the “alchemical” and “medical” associations he makes in his poetry. Karl Keller points out in “The Example of Edward Taylor,” for instance, that “Taylor’s compendious collections, Dispensatory (a pharmacopeia) and Metallographia (an alchemist’s guide), were the sorts of reference works needed by and shared among frontier doctors of the time” (6). William Newman and Lawrence Principe claim that the “principle of discordia concors—harmonious discord—forms the guiding principle behind much of the imagery found in [Taylor’s poetry]” (182). Newman and Principe trace Taylor’s “extensive use of alchemical imagery” to this notion of discordia concors, a method of versification alchemists used to conceal their art. Their reasons for secrecy were numerous, say Newman and Principe: “Among these were trade secrecy, titillation of the market, and apprehensions about economic unsettlement if the Philosopher’s Stone should become common knowledge” (180). This arcane knowledge of recipes and ingredients, chemical processes and theories the alchemists tried to veil in extended conceits and cryptic symbols, in “fanciful accounts of bizarre transactions between kings and queens, dragons and toads, eagles and hermaphrodites” (182). It is this juxtaposition of incongruous images in the alchemical conceit that leads to the metaphysical conceit, continue Newman and Principe, to which Samuel Johnson gives clearest expression in his treatment of “wit” in the life of Abraham Cowley: “Wit,” writes Johnson, “abstracted from its effects upon the hearer, may be more rigorously and philosophically considered as a kind of discordia concors; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult [i.e., hidden] resemblances in things apparently unlike” (183). Newman and Principe cite several commentators on Edward Taylor’s poetry to develop their argument that Taylor read extensively the alchemical and medical literature available during the period, internalized its style of discordia concors, and employed it in his poetry to reveal a surface chaos and internal coherence. Among others, Newman and Principe cite Karen Joyce Gordon-Grube’s “The Alchemical ‘Golden Tree’ and Associated Imagery in the Poems of Edward Taylor,” Cheryl Z. Oreovicz’s “Edward Taylor and the Alchemy of Grace,” Oreovicz’s “Investigating ‘The America of Nature’: Alchemy in Early American Poetry,” and Jeffrey Walker’s “Anagrams and Acrostics: Puritan Poetic Wit.” Drawing on these scholars’ work in their treatment of Taylor’s “alchemical influence,” Newman and Principe conclude that “in true Harvardian fashion,” Taylor compiled a synopsis of John Webster’s 1671 Metallographia. In addition . . . Taylor was [also] a medical practitioner. His Dispensatory or collection of medical recipes has survived, and it contains numerous medicaments. Hence Taylor clearly regarded chymistry [sic] as an area of high utility, especially in its application to medicine. At the same time, however, he employed the imagery of stills, alembics, [and] elixirs . . . throughout his poetry. The Deity Himself became an alchemist in Taylor’s view: “God Chymist is, doth Sharon’s Rose distill. / Oh! Choice Rose Water! Swim my soul herein” [“Mediation 4”]. And as if to demonstrate the very pleasure that early modern intellectuals took in learned play, Taylor composed a number of his poems in the form of acrostics, sometimes even supplying them with dedications in the form of anagrams. (183) William Scheick also documents the alchemical associations Taylor makes in his poetry in his essay “Edward Taylor’s Optics.” Scheick discusses Taylor’s allusions to alchemy to intimate “the mysterious transition between the postlapsarian spiritual eye as an Aristotelian reflector and the regenerated spiritual eye as a Platonic emitter of light.” Scheick contends that In Taylor’s day many believed that wherever the rays of the sun fell most directly on the earth, there could be found the greatest abundance of precious metals, especially gold. The sun’s heat, many believed, could alter the proportions of properties in an element, which thereby could be
The sacramental wine that Taylor enjoys in the feast conceit he also develops in “Meditation 71,” where he draws on the sacramental wine as a symbol of sacrificial blood, specifically as it gets used in the Israelites’ purification rituals outlined in Leviticus. In his “Meditation 26” on Hebrews 9.13-14, “How much more shall the blood of Christ, etc.,” Taylor opens the poem imagining himself suffering from one of the many skin diseases treated in Leviticus. These opening verses anticipate his anxieties about the Calvinist’s logical impasse—the paradox of propriety—that he treats in “Meditation 35,” namely, the “Undo-doing” which Christ’s sacrifice must undo to renew man’s covenant with God:

Unclean, Unclean: My Lord, Undone, all vile,

Yea all Defil’d: What shall thy servant doe?

Unfit for thee: not fit for holy soile,

Nor for Communion of Saints below.

A bag of botches, Lump of Loathsomeness:

Defild by Touch, by Issue: Leproast flesh. (2.26, lines 1-6)

 changed from one thing into another. Taylor applied this alchemical notion to the spiritual eye; for him the ideal situation would involve an intense exposure to the “rowling Eye of Light” of the Son/sun (1.13, 19) in order “to heate [the spiritual] Eyes and make the Sight the Quicker” (2.67, 57). (238)

In his book Downcast Eyes, Martin Jay corroborates Scheick’s tracing of Taylor’s optics to Plato’s theory of “extramission.” Jay writes that “Plato argued that the eye and the sun are composed of like substance, and the Greeks believed that the eye transmitted as well as received light rays (the theory of extramission).” The alchemical images in Taylor’s poetry at once suggest the “occult” and “cordial” of the pharmacopeia, which Derrida treats in his analysis of the Greek’s bias against writing as pharmakon in “Plato’s Pharmacy,” and traces specifically to Socrates’s anxiety that writing possesses the arcane power to “alter the proportions of properties in an element, which thereby could be changed from one thing into another” (Scheick 238).
Taylor examines his own fallen condition as “unclean,” “undone,” “vile,” “defiled” and therefore “unfit” to serve God, and he builds these descriptions of his fallen condition toward impropriety, his unfitness for serving the Lord and administering the Lord’s supper. In his capacity as minister of the sacrifice, Taylor conflates images of himself as Aaron making sacrifices to the Lord and images of himself as an Israelite suffering from one of the Old Testament skin diseases in need of purification. Later in this meditation, Taylor takes the sacramental wine as symbol of Christ’s blood, which serves as antitype of the “heifers Ashes,” “Dooves,” “Burnt, and sin Offerings” that “when calcin’d / [and] Mixt all in running Water is too Weake / To wash away [Taylor’s] Filth” (lines 19-21). These blood and burnt offerings from Leviticus cannot wash away his sin, but Taylor trades upon their typological significance, writing that “they Emblemize the Fountain spring / Thy Blood, my Lord, set ope to wash off Sin” (lines 22-23). The “hope” of purity and salvation that Taylor references in the fourth stanza recalls the “soap” of the previous stanza, which “wash[es] him White” (line 18) that Taylor “may enter, and sully here / Thy Church [and holy soile of the first stanza], whose floore is pav’de with Graces bright / And hold Church fellowship with Saints most clear” (lines 32-34). His entrance into the holiest of holies and his fellowship with the Saints of course depends upon his “prop[r]iety,” his social “fittingness” and his spiritual purity or “piety.” Taylor imagines himself as a social-spiritual leper who is unworthy of entering into the social community, and in need of purification that he might enter into the spiritual communion with the Lord and his Saints.

Taylor carries his reading of the sacramental wine as symbol of the blood of Christ’s sacrifice into “Meditation 27,” in which he once more treats the blood as antitype of purification rites found in Leviticus:

The slain Dove’s buri’d: In whose Blood in water
The Living Turtle, Ceder, Scarlet twine

And Hysop diptd are (as an allator)

Sprinkling the Leper with it seven times.

That typify Christs Blood by Grace appli’de

To Sinners vile, and then they’re purifi’de. (lines 31-36)

Taylor offers all the elements of the Leviticus purification ritual: doves’ blood, water, cedar wood, and scarlet yarn. These elements suggest that the purification ritual that Taylor has in mind is the one explained in Leviticus 14:51-52, in which the priest cleanses the house of “defiling molds.” Leviticus 14 is entirely devoted to explaining purification rituals, verses 1-32 explaining the priest’s cleansing of the Israelite suffering from one or another skin disease\textsuperscript{187} and verses 33-57 explaining the priest’s cleansing of the mud-walled house.

Taylor’s conflation of these different cleansing rituals is typologically significant, for in his reference to “hyssop,” for instance, Taylor recalls God’s command to use hyssop to spread the blood of the paschal lamb upon the door posts in Exodus 12:22, “And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the bason, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the bason; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until morning.” Taylor also recalls God’s command in Numbers 19:18 that hyssop ought to be used to purify anyone who has come into contact with a dead body: “And a clean person shall take hyssop, and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it upon the tent, and upon all the vessels, and upon the persons that were there, and upon him that touched a bone, or one slain, or one dead, or a grave.” In addition, Taylor recalls David’s reference to hyssop in Psalm 51:7, “Purge me with

\textsuperscript{187} The Hebrew word traditionally translated as “leprosy” can in fact stand for several skin diseases.
hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” Finally, Taylor recalls the Roman soldiers’ use of hyssop in John 19:29 to satiate Christ’s thirst upon the cross: “Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a spunge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth.” Taylor’s reference to the ritual “Hysop diptd” in blood, which is spread or sprinkled to cleanse the sinner of death (i.e. the angel of death in Exodus, the taint of the dead body in Numbers, or the stain of sin in Psalm 51), also typifies “Christ’s Blood by Grace appli’d / To Sinners vile, and then they’re purifi’d” (lines 35-36). The Old Testament ritual of course typifies the New Testament sacrifice, the blood of life “that is in the bason” (Exodus 12:22) signifying “vessel full of vinegar,” whose bitter taste in turn signifies Christ’s death on the cross. Like the blood of these Old Testament rituals, Christ’s blood purifies the sinner of his sin and his death saves the sinner from the taint of death.

Taylor’s conflation of purification rituals in Leviticus 14—cleansing both leper and house—is also metaphorically significant, for he refers in other meditations to sinners’ “Bodies Vile,” as “Mudwall tent[s], whose Matters are / Dead Elements, which mixt make dusty trade” (“Meditation 2.75” lines 4, 13-14). Taylor sees the sinner’s body as a house or temple defiled, base, and vile, in need of Christ’s body—the bread of Lord’s Supper—to purify and sanctify what he also describes as “A varnisht pot of putrid excrements” (line 25), an image that certainly contrasts with the “bason” in Exodus that holds the purifying blood of the paschal lamb or the “golden cup” in the Lord’s Supper that contains the sacramental wine symbolizing Christ’s sanctifying blood. Taylor’s “Dead” “Mudwall tent” calls to mind the second purification ritual in Leviticus 14, which is enacted to cleanse a house into which the plague of leprosy has entered:
[T]he priest shall command that they empty the house, before the priest go into it to see the plague, that all that is in the house be not made unclean: and afterward the priest shall go in to see the house:

And he shall look on the plague, and, behold, if the plague be in the walls of the house with hollow strakes, greenish or reddish, which in sight are lower than the wall;

Then the priest shall command that they take away the stones in which the plague is, and they shall cast them into an unclean place without the city:

And he shall cause the house to be scraped within round about, and they shall pour out the dust that they scrape off without the city into an unclean place:

And they shall take other stones, and put them in the place of those stones; and he shall take other mortar, and shall plaister the house. (14:36-42)

Taylor imagines the sinner’s body like a mud-wall house, whose stones and plaster are infected with leprosy and in need of purging and purification. Infected stones are removed and cast out into an unclean place without the city; infected plaster is scraped and its dust scattered into an unclean place without the city. New stones and fresh plaster replace the old, and the house’s inhabitants are purified according to the ritual for cleansing lepers:

Then shall the priest command to take for him that is to be cleansed two birds alive and clean, and cedar wood, and scarlet, and hyssop:
And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water:

As for the living bird, he shall take it, and the cedar wood, and the scarlet, and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water:

And he shall sprinkle upon him that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose into the open field.

And he that is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes, and shave off all his hair, and wash himself in water, that he may be clean: and after that he shall come into the camp, and shall tarry abroad out of his tent seven days.

But it shall be on the seventh day, that he shall shave all his hair off his head and his beard and his eyebrows, even all his hair he shall shave off: and he shall wash his clothes, also he shall wash his flesh in water, and he shall be clean.

. . . .

And the priest shall take some of the blood of the trespass offering, and the priest shall put it upon the tip of the right ear of him that is to be cleansed, and upon the thumb of his right hand, and upon the great toe of his right foot: (14:4-14)

Taylor’s use of images for purifying both the body and house, particularly his conflation of body images in “Mudwall tent” and temple, suggests both the sinner’s social-spiritual body and
Christ’s sacrificial body. The individual body infected with leprosy is a social pariah, cast without the community much like the house’s infected stones are removed to, and its plaster scraped away and the dust poured out upon, an unclean place without the city.\textsuperscript{188}

The purification ritual is performed upon both house and leper in much the same way: The priest takes two birds, which in lines 31 and 32 of “Meditation 27” Taylor identifies as “Turtle Doves,” and kills one in an earthen vessel over running water, and then takes the cedar wood, hyssop, scarlet yarn, and living bird and dips them in the blood of the slain bird and running water and sprinkles them upon either the body of the person suffering from leprosy or the walls of the house infected with the disease and thereafter sets the live bird free into the field and

\begin{quote}
Sprindo Lord mee With it [i.e. blood]. Wash me also in The Poole of Shiloam, and shave mee bare With Gospell Razer. Though the Roots of Sin Bud up again, again shave off its hair. Thy Eighth dayes Bath, and Razer make more gay, Than th’Virgin Maries Purifying day. (lines 37-42)
\end{quote}

In his use of the term “Gospell Razer,” Taylor implies that Christ’s Word and grace scrape or shave the infection of sin from Taylor’s body, “sin so strong,” Raymond Craig points out in “The ’Peculiar Elegance’ of Edward Taylor’s Poetics,” that “the razor must be used twice” (95). Craig argues, however, that the reference is not to Leviticus, for “the term does not appear there—but to any of a number of Old Testament sources” in which “the razor is used to remove the hair, which itself is an indication of strength” (95). Craig notes, for instance, Isa. 7:20: “In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired, namely, by them beyond the river, by the king of Assyria, the head, and the hair of the head: and it shall consume the beard.” Craig cites Keach and Thomas Taylor’s commentaries on this passage, specifically Taylor’s interpretation of the “razor metaphor” as “a fierce and cruel enemy, which destroys and cuts downe all, as a sharpe Rasor shaues and cuts all bare” (389). Craig also offers Num. 6:5, Judg. 13:5 and 16:17, 1 Sam. 1:11, and Ps. 52.2, for example. Craig is right to argue that the term does not appear in Leviticus, but the sense is certainly present there.
pronounces leprous person or house clean. The ritual is significant for three reasons: first, because the “infected dust” removed from the house signifies the “crumbs of dust” Taylor often uses to characterize man’s body and the stones of the house replaced with fresh stones suggests the stones of the temple, or members who make up the church; second, because the “crumbs of dust” mixed with purifying water at once suggests the new mud or plaster that coats the walls of the clean house and the flour and water used to make the bread of life that symbolizes the purification of the sinner’s soul in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper; and third, because the two doves signify both scapegoat and sacrifice, the scapegoat representing Christ’s taking upon himself the sins of humanity and the sacrifice serving as type for Christ’s sacrificial blood washing the sinner’s soul of its sin. Taylor transitions from doves to lambs in lines 43-48 to mark the priest’s proclamation that the leper or house is clean.

After this proclamation, the leper washes his clothes and shaves off all his hair before returning to the camp. Though he is accepted back into the community of believers, still he must tarry outside his tent for another seven days, shave the hair from his body once more, and on the eighth day, present himself before the priest who purified him with lambs for a “trespass

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189 Taylor juxtaposes the “crumb of dust” with the “granule of flour” in “Meditation 1.8” and “Meditation 1.9” on John 6:51 “I am the living bread.” In “Meditation 1.8” Taylor writes, for instance, that God [T]o end all strife
The Purest Wheate in Heaven, his deare-dear  
Grinds, and kneads up into this Bread of Life. (lines 20-22)
And after reflecting upon the degree of grace imbued in the bread of the Lord’s Supper, Taylor writes in “Meditation 1.9,”
What wonder’s here, that Bread of Life should come
To feed Dead Dust? Dry Dust eate Living Bread? (lines 31-32)
The bread of the Lord’s Supper of course signifies the body of Christ sacrificed for the sins of humanity, but also the Manna—or heavenly bread—the Israelites made from the flour dust that blanketed the land like dew every morning when they awoke, which they consumed to nourish and sustain themselves during their wanderings in the desert.

190 The “scapegoat-sacrifice” that served as the double emblem of the Old Testament purification rite I discuss below, citing Jacques Derrida’s reading of the double meaning of Plato’s “pharmacy,” which meant both poison and cure. The image of Christ’s blood bathing the walls of the “Mudwall tent,” which Taylor refers to in “Meditation 2.75” as “A varnisht pot of putrid excrements” (line 25), echoes Luther’s image of Christ’s imputed justification of the sinner as a blanket of snow covering a dung heap.
offering.” Taylor refers to this second purification ritual, this second sacrifice, as “Thy Eighth dayes Bath” (line 41), whereby the leper is cleansed “at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation” (Leviticus 14:11). The place of the ritual and sacrifice is certainly significant, for this cleansing happens in the temple of the Lord and follows the same ritual practice (see Leviticus 4:14 above) for preparing High Priests to serve the Lord:

My Trespass, Sin, and my Burnt Sacrifice

My Flowre and Oyle, for my meate Offering

My Lord, thou art. Whether Lambs or Doves up rise

And with thy Holy Blood atonement bring.

And put thy Blood upon my Right Eare fair

Whose tip shall it, its Onely jewell, Ware.

. . . .

Then Holiness shall Consecrate mine Eare.

And sanctifie my Fingers Ends, and Toes.

And in my hearing, Working, Walking here

The Breath of Sanctifying Grace out goes.

Perfuming all these Actions, and my life.

Oh! sweetest sweet. Hence Holiness is rife. (lines 43-48, 55-60)
In “Meditation 27,” Taylor thus conflates images of the leper’s purification with images of the priest’s cleansing; the Leviticus rite of taking the blood of guilt offering and putting it upon the right ear lobe, thumb of the right hand, and big toe of the right foot was also used to purify the priest. Moses performs this same ritual in Exodus 29:20 upon Aaron and his sons, who were called by God to serve as High Priests and perform the priest’s office of sacrificing guilt and sin offerings unto God. This ceremony typifies the baptism of Christ, who was anointed with the Holy Spirit, much like the “Oyle” with which Aaron and his sons were anointed, clothed with glory, much like Aaron and his sons were clothed with garments of the priesthood, and consecrated with the blood of his sacrifice, much like the blood which was sprinkled upon the altar and Aaron and his sons’ garments to consecrate them: “And [Moses] brought Aaron’s sons, and [he] put some of the blood upon the tip of their right ears, and upon the thumbs of their right hands, and upon the great toes of their right feet: and Moses sprinkled the blood upon the altar round about” (Leviticus 8:24).

Commentators on this passage largely agree that blood was applied to ear, thumb, and toe to signify that the priest was to dedicate all his faculties to serving God—the ears representing his hearing and internalizing God’s law, the hands representing his ministry and acts of sacrifice that symbolize his obedience to the law, and the feet representing his walking in the way of the law’s precepts. Taylor’s “Meditation 26” and “Meditation 27” focus on the propriety of sprinkling

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191 In Exodus 29:20, God commands Moses, “Then shalt thou kill the ram, and take of his blood, and put it upon the tip of the right ear of Aaron, and upon the tip of the right ear of his sons, and upon the thumb of their right hand, and upon the great toe of their right foot, and sprinkle the blood upon the altar round about.”

192 In his Annotations upon the five books of Moses, for instance, Henry Ainsworth interprets Exodus 29:20, in which God commands Moses to perform the ritual of purification to cleanse Aaron and his sons as High Priests, and Leviticus 14:14, in which Moses records the ritual for purifying the leper, in much the same way. It bears repeating that in Exodus 29:20 God commands Moses, “Then shalt thou kill the ram, and take of his blood, and put it upon the tip of the right ear of Aaron, and upon the tip of the right ear of his sons, and upon the thumb of their right hand, and upon the great toe of their right foot, and sprinkle the blood upon the altar round about.” In Leviticus 14:14, Moses records the priest’s cleansing of the leper before the
the blood of sacrifice, which cleanses the priest of the Old Testament and teaches him that he cannot hear, work, or walk profitably and uprightly in the sight of God without his having been purified by the blood of the sacrifice and without his having inhaled the breath of the Spirit. It also typifies the New Testament’s “priesthood of all believers” who must offer spiritual sacrifices that remind them that they cannot do anything profitably or uprightly outside of Christ’s sanctifying blood and grace. Taylor once more anticipates at the close of “Meditation 27” Christ’s undoing of Adam’s “Undo-doing” in “Meditation 35,” for he writes that Christ’s “Breath of Sanctifying Grace . . . Perfum[es] all [my] Actions, and my life” (lines 58-59). Without the Spirit of God to “inspire” Taylor’s thoughts and “perfume” his actions, Taylor’s thoughts come to nothing good and his actions “quickly turn to excrements” (2.75, line 26). Without Christ’s “Perfume,” Taylor’s thoughts, words, and actions can only disgust the Lord; this perfume, therefore, implies propriety—as that which is socially-spiritually appropriate and acceptable in the sight of God.

Ainsworth reads “prop(r)iety” in this Old Testament purification ritual, which instructs both ministers and their congregants that they cannot hear, think, speak, or walk in the Word of God without having been first sanctified by the blood of Christ. Christ’s blood purifies thought, word, and work so that the believer might live a pious life and walk in the ways of the Lord.
The rhetoric of propriety Taylor employs in his transition from the rite of cleansing the leper to the rite of cleansing the High Priest he also employs in his treatment of Aaron as a type for Christ in “Meditation 23” on 1 John 2:2, “He is the propitiation for our sins.” Just as Aaron serves as a type for Christ in his performance of the ritual of sacrifice to purify the sins of the Israelites, so too does Taylor serve as an antitype for Aaron in his administration of the Lord’s Supper to cleanse the sins of his congregants. Taylor opens the poem treating God’s disproportionate mercy in lending ear to Taylor’s prayers, and these opening reflections prepare for typological disproportions he examines in the stanzas that follow. Taylor opens the poem singing the Lord’s praise:

Greate Lord yea Greatest Lord of Lords thou art,
And King of Kings, may my poor Creaking Pipe
Salute thine Eare. This thought doth Sink my heart
Ore burdened with over sweet Delight.
An Ant bears more proportion to the World
Than doth my piping to thine eare thus hurld.
It is a Sight amazing strange to see
An Emperour picking an Emmets Egge.
More strange it’s that Almighty should to mee
E’re lend his Eare. And yet this thing I beg.
I’m Small and Naught, thou mayst much less me Spare
Than I the Nit that hangeth on my hair.

But oh thy Grace! (lines 1-13)

Taylor’s anxiety that his song glorifying God does little justice to God’s greatness dissipates in line 13 when he considers Christ’s sacrifice as propitiation for his sin. That the Almighty would “lend his Eare” to Taylor’s “Creaking Pipe” reveals the disproportionate compassion that God has for man and the extent of his clemency for his transgressions. Taylor marvels at the sheer scope of God’s grace and wonders why the King of Kings should listen to his song, a disproportion Taylor equates to the World’s giving audience to the Ant, or to Almighty’s sparing Taylor much like Taylor would spare a louse’s egg hanging in his hair. In the likeness he draws between himself and the “Emmets Egge” Taylor proposes that his relationship to God is “parasitic” rather than “symbiotic.” God profits nothing by it. Yet, as Taylor shows in his development of Aaron as type for Christ, the poem functions as Taylor’s spiritual sacrifice—spiritual work that Taylor conducts by the new dispensation’s “priesthood of all believers”—which teaches him, much like the sacrifices carried out by the High Priest of the Israelites, that he cannot do anything profitably or uprightly outside of Christ’s sanctifying blood and grace.

Taylor transitions to Aaron as type for Christ directly following his exclamation of wonder about God’s disproportionate grace. Aaron’s priestly service on Atonement Day—the sacrifices he carries out on behalf of the community—stands for Christ’s sacrifice to atone for the sins of all mankind. Taylor’s treatment of disproportions in the poem’s opening prepares for his suggestion that it is only by the logic of synecdoche that Taylor and the exegetes preceding and following him can read Aaron as a type for Christ, and that Taylor can read himself as antitype
for both Aaron and Christ. \footnote{Taylor opens the poem with metaphorical disproportions—God as World, Man as Ant; God as Emperor, Man as Emmets Egge—which he uses to prepare for the central (metonymic) disproportion of the poem: Aaron’s sacrifice for the sins of the Israelites as Christ’s sacrifice for the sins of the world, and Taylor’s symbolic sacrifice in the Lord’s Supper as symbol for both. The proportional logic Taylor here uses echoes Augustine’s use of proportional logic to think through the “propriety” of his relationship to God through Christ, especially in his \textit{Confessions}. Taylor’s reference to the “Type [as] all unmeet / To typify him” reveals that Taylor is aware of the disproportion as an “impropriety”—that neither Aaron’s animal sacrifice nor Taylor’s symbolic-spiritual sacrifice in the Lord’s Supper can ever hope to contain in their type-logic the superabundant grace effected by Christ’s sacrifice in propitiation for man’s sins. Taylor is keenly aware that his approach to the Lord’s Supper is “overdetermined,” saturated as it is with historical residues, prophetic suggestions, and symbolic-spiritual meanings. Dialectical method serves to unpack Taylor’s reflections upon the Lord’s Supper and the intertextual patterning he achieves in his poetry in large part because he—and we—recognize that the ritual of the Lord’s Supper both condenses meaning (in metaphorical suggestions) and displaces meaning (in metonymic and typological pairings).} Aaron’s animal sacrifices atone for the sins of the Israelite community wandering the desert. Christ’s human self-sacrifice atones for the sins of the world. Taylor’s administrations of the Lord’s Supper symbolically represent Aaron’s animal sacrifices and Christ’s human sacrifice and atone for his sins and the sins of his congregants. Unlike other of his meditations, in which Taylor imagines himself as observer or witness, \footnote{Taylor opens “Meditation 27,” for example, imagining God’s “Sparkling Fold” in “My mental Eye” (line 1). Taylor achieves these “visionary” moments and poetic flights only ephemerally, and very often only in the opening and closing lines of his meditations. For instance, Taylor invokes the Holy Spirit as Muse in the opening verses of “Meditation 59,” praying to the Spirit Wilt thou enoculate within mine Eye
Thy image bright, My Lord, that bright doth shine
Forth in the Cloudy-Firy Pillar high
Thy Tabernacles Looking-Glass Divine?
What glorious Rooms are then mine Eyeholes made.
Thine Images on my windows Glass portrai’d? (lines 1-6) The poem begins with Taylor’s visionary hope that he can approach the Lord and appropriately reflect (upon) His glory. Like other meditations, however, Taylor then falls from these hopeful, visionary heights when he recognizes that he can neither contain nor sustain the image. The poem closes with Taylor’s expression of perseverance, which suggests that in life he can continue to hope for what he may only achieve in death: “I shall thy praise under this Shadow sing” (line 36).} Taylor here conflates his approach to the Lord’s Supper with Aaron and Christ’s sacrifices as propitiation for man’s sins, first imagining himself as Aaron, who prepared two goats—one to set free and the other for sacrifice—in atonement for the Israelites’ sins, and then reading this dual animal sacrifice as a type for Christ (as both scapegoat and sacrifice):

\begin{quote}
Sins thick and threefold at my threshold lay
\end{quote}
At Graces threshold I all gore in Sin.

Christ backt the Curtain. Grace made bright the day,

As did our Atonement full step in.

So Glorious he. His Type is all unmeet

To typify him till aton’d and sweet. (lines 19-24)

Taylor imagines himself as Aaron in the tent of the tabernacle. Having just made a trespass offering unto God, he finds himself “At Graces threshold . . . all gore in Sin.” Covered with the blood of the animal sacrifice, which implies both grace and gore, as well as the filth of sin, Taylor is reminded that the blood he offers in atonement for his sin is really Christ’s blood, for it is the blood of Christ that purifies and affords him entrance to the tabernacle. Taylor envisions himself as Aaron, standing at the threshold of the curtain separating him from the holiest of holies. Christ backs the curtain, and the holy ground beyond it man’s full atonement and full communion with God. The image is fitting in that Taylor meditates in these lines upon his approach to the Lord’s Supper and upon Christ’s sacrifice, which makes that approach possible.

The conflation of animal blood with Christ’s blood, and Christ’s blood with the sacramental wine moves Taylor to consider himself an antitype for Aaron, though he finds Aaron (and himself by extension) as types “all unmeet” (line 23) for typifying Christ. The type is altogether unsuitable—a stylistic impropriety—at least until full atonement purifies Aaron and Taylor and allows them to fully step beyond the threshold of the curtain into full communion with God through Christ:

A’ron as he atonement made, did ware
His milke white linen Robes, to typify

Christ cloath’d in human flesh pure White, all fair,

And undelfild, atoneing God most High.

Two Goates he took, and lots to know Gods will

Which he should send away: and Which, should kill. (lines 25-30)

Taylor refers to the blood of the animal sacrifice in propitiation of man’s sin as a symbol for Christ’s flesh-and-blood sacrifice washing the stain of sin from the human soul. The white robes of the Israelites’ High Priest represent the soul cleansed of sin, and typify Christ’s flesh, which was the only human flesh free from the stain of sin. The gore of the animal sacrifice that covers Aaron’s white robes mirrors the blood of Christ’s human sacrifice, which covers his pure, white body and which Taylor merely suggests in the pair of images he presents: “[Aaron’s] milke white linen Robes, to typify / Christ cloath’d in human flesh pure White, all fair” (lines 26-27). Taylor here anticipates Aaron’s sprinkling of the blood of the animal sacrifice upon tabernacle, altar, and congregation later in the poem, “for defild all were,” which he likens to “Christ with his proper blood [who, after its shedding] did enter in / The Heavens bright, propitiates for [all of humanity’s] Sin” (lines 46-48). Taylor once more recalls in line 46 of the poem—“Christ with his proper blood”—the stylistic impropriety he admits into lines 23 and 24 of the poem: “His Type is all unmeet / To typify him till aton’d and sweet.” Taylor anticipates the atonement effected by Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, which, like the animal sacrifice that purifies Aaron and allows him to cross the threshold that separates him from the tabernacle that he might step fully onto the holy ground beyond, purifies humanity of its sin that it may cross the threshold into

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195 My emphasis.
perfect communion with God through Christ in heaven. Until this perfect atonement is realized, Aaron and Taylor are “all unmeet” to serve as types for Christ.

Still, Taylor persists in this reflection, as he does in several other of his meditations, and rounds out the type, which borders on allegory in its complexity and symbolic richness:

Dear Christ, thy Natures two are typ’t thereby

Making one sacrifice, Humane, Divine.

The Manhood is Gods Lot, and this must dy.

The Godhead as the Scape Goate death declines.

One Goat atones, one beares all Sin away.

Thy natures do this work, each as they lay. (lines 31-36)

Taylor develops his treatment of the animal sacrifice as type for Christ to include the High Priest’s double sacrifice of the “sacrificial goat” and “scapegoat,” which carries a wealth of interesting connotations. This twofold sacrifice suggests not only Christ’s dual nature as both humane and divine, but also that Christ’s humanity—the “sacrificial goat”—must die that all of humanity might live, and Christ’s divinity—the “scapegoat”—must carry the burden of all humanity’s sins, even as Christ’s body and soul are assumed into heaven. Taylor recognizes these sacrifices as a single sacrifice to save man from death, which he suggests in his play upon the word “lot” in line 29 and “Lot” in line 33. In line 29, Taylor refers to the lot the High Priest drew to determine which goat would die in sacrifice and which goat would live as scapegoat. In lines 33 and 34, Taylor refers to Christ as both “The Manhood [Humane, which] is Gods Lot, and this must dy” as well as “The Godhead [Divine, which] as the Scape Goate death declines.” Taylor’s
use of the term “Manhood” to represent Christ’s humanity as God’s “Lot” also refers to humanity’s “lot”—or God’s perfect justice—by which man must spiritually die without Christ’s bodily death in expiation for man’s sin.

Taylor’s use of the scapegoat also suggests beyond the poem and returns us, as readers of Taylor’s poetry, to the reading experience itself, which commentators have described as complicated, confusing, or at the very least highly involved. Like Taylor, the reader risks getting tied up in knots, in language so highly intertextual and self-referential that the reading experience becomes vertiginous. Taylor’s discourse—his “running to and fro”—from type to antitype, from allusion to allusion, from image to image creates a complicated patterning in his poetry, textures which resist easy explication, for they demand that the reader “cross the threshold” separating stanzas, poems, scripture, commentary, and ritual to occupy the liminal space between them, in which the line separating symbols from referents blurs and the symbols become oversaturated with meaning. Taylor’s ontology of course allows for the collapsing of word into Word, for in the very ritual of the Lord’s Supper, this is precisely what Taylor desires to achieve: perfect communion with the Word-made-flesh in Christ. As Taylor reflects upon the sacrifice symbolized in this ritual in “Meditation 23,” he is reminded that he can achieve perfect communion only in death, and that the Lord’s Supper serves as symbol of Christ’s bodily sacrifice and the communicant’s sacrifice of faith. Taylor is aware that his Preparatory Meditations serve as ministerial preparations to approach and administer the Lord’s Supper to his congregation; however, he is also aware that these ministerial preparations reflect the preparation of his soul for heaven. For Taylor, heaven is just beyond the curtain “backed by Christ,” and Taylor suggests in the palimpsest image in the Prologue a sometimes pleasant and sometimes painful awareness that
his words merely shadow the glory of the Word that shines through them, and that the world
merely curtains the glory of God that penetrates and permeates it. 196

Taylor occupies this liminal space in his meditations, and in the pleasant moments of
poetic flight and fancy, which he ascribes to the superabundant grace and glory of God, he is
given glimpses behind the curtain that he may look upon the holiest of holies shining through it.
He describes this liminal space as his standing at the threshold and facing the tabernacle curtain
backed by Christ:

Sins thick and threefold at my threshold lay

At Graces threshold I all gore in Sin.

Christ backt the Curtain. Grace made bright the day,

As did our Atonement full step in.

So Glorious he. (lines 19-23)

At painful moments, however, he realizes that he cannot sustain the flight and that the images that
appear in his mind’s eye are merely “shadows of divine things.” He understands the images as
symbols speaking to “My Mental Eye,” offering him glimpses that he might “spy . . . thy
Sparkling Fold / Bedeckt, my Lord, with Glories shine alone” (2.27, lines 1-2). It is in these
moments that Taylor recalls the writings of St. Paul, who says in 1 Corinthians 13:12, “For now
we see through a glass, darkly.” Taylor articulates in “Meditation 59” the same desire to see
more, but for the darkness and sin of his soul, which keeps him without the tabernacle curtain
“backed by Christ.” In the first stanza, for instance, Taylor calls upon the Holy Spirit as his Muse,

196 For an explication of the Prologue’s palimpsest image, see Chapter 6, Part 1 “Taylor’s ‘Decorum of
Imperfections’ Reconsidered.”
in order to achieve the poetic flight and fancy necessary to see the image of God through the
curtain of Christ in his mind’s eye:

Wilt though enoculate within mine Eye

Thy Image bright, My Lord, that bright doth shine

Forth in the Cloudy-Firy Piller high

Thy Tabernacles Looking-Glass Divine?

What glorious Rooms are then mine Eyeholes made.

Thine Images on my windows Glass portrai’d? (lines 1-6)

Taylor’s reference to the “Cloudy-Firy Piller high” suggests the presence of God in the Israelites’
tent of the tabernacle. Taylor calls upon the Spirit to “enoculate” his diseased eye and cleanse it
of its sin that the image of God might appear there. Taylor envisions his eye as a space wherein
God’s image might rest as well as a looking-glass in which that same image might be reflected.
As space—“What glorious Rooms are then mine Eyeholes made”—Taylor imagines his eyes as a
doorway to some rhetorical-spiritual place in his mind (or in his mind’s eye) where he and God
might commun(e)icate. As looking-glass—“Thine Images on my windows Glass portrai’d”—Taylor
imagines his eyes as mirrors reflecting God’s image. Taylor trades upon the eyes as
symbols of mental reflection, a fitting symbol seeing as Taylor is in the midst of meditation.

Yet Taylor is also aware that his words, and the ritual of the Lord’s Supper, mediate his
communion with the divine,197 for as he admits later in the poem, the “Tent of the Holy Ghost” is

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197 In “Meditation 2.9” on Deuteronomy 18:15, “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet—like
unto me,” for instance, Taylor envisions himself as antitype of Moses, who looked upon the face of God
and lived:
“Christ's Looking Glass that on his Camp gives shine. / Whose backside's pitchy darkness to his foes” (lines 18-20). This last line recalls line 21 of “Meditation 23”—Taylor’s image of standing at the threshold of the tabernacle, facing the curtain “backed by Christ.” In “Meditation 23,” however, Taylor is Aaron’s antitype, and so he is granted access to the holiest of holies which shines out from behind the veil. It is near the same point in “Meditation 59” (namely, line 20), then, that Taylor refers to the group without the Israelites’ camp—the sinners who are without access to the tent of the tabernacle—as occupying “The Mediator Province in a Map” (line 23).

Without the effect of Christ’s grace to justify him before God, Taylor can easily envision himself in this other camp toward whom Christ turns his back and leaves in “pitchy darkness.” He is a sinner after all, who decries in other meditations the very metaphors that mediate his relationship to the divine. His eyeholes as spaces of communion or looking glasses reflecting the divine image shadows the doctrine that none can look upon the face of God and live (Exod. 33:20, Matt. 5:8)—that the curtain separates him as a living sinner from the holiest of holies beyond. Still, Taylor

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Lord, let thy Dazzling shine refracted fan'de
   In this bright Looking Glass, its favour lay
Upon mine Eyes that oculated stand
   And peep thereat, in button molds of clay
Whose glory otherwise that Courts mine eye
   Will all its sparkling family destroy.

Yea let thy Beams, better ten thousand times
   Than brightest Eyebright, cherishing revive
The Houshold that possesseth all the shrines
   In Visions Palace, that it well may thrive.
Moses is made the Looking glass: in which
   Mine Eyes to spie thee in this Type I pitch. (lines 1-12)

Taylor prays for Moses’s place that he may look upon the face of God, commune with him and live. He prays, however, that God “refract” or “fan out” his “Dazzling shine” lest it overwhelm his limited mental sight and understanding, so that instead of destroying these mental faculties, God’s “Beams” might “revive” them and illuminate his “Visions Palace” that his mental faculties might “thrive” in worship and praise of God, “enshrined” as they are in his poetry. Yet, in the final two lines of the second stanza, in which Taylor occupies Moses’ place as the Lord’s “Looking glass,” Taylor suggests that though he “pitches” himself into this place as Moses’s antitype, the typo-logic does not quite bear out for him; that he does not reflect God’s image as Moses had; that his glass is “darkened” like “pitch”: “Moses is made the Looking glass: in which / Mine Eyes to spie in this Type I pitch” (lines 11-12).
persists through these poetic falls or failings, ever faithful that the glimpse he is given in his poetic flights, albeit shadowed, fanciful, and ephemeral, will be fulfilled in course of time. He thus closes his song of praise to God on a hopeful note:

I shall not lag nor tire

But as to Cana’n I am journeying

I shall thy praise under this Shadow sing. (lines 34-36)

Concerned in many other meditations with the propriety of his praise, which reveals his rhetorical-social-spiritual separation from the divine, Taylor here reveals that he will nevertheless sing tirelessly on his journey to Canaan, that it is in the writing process that he does God’s work. That Taylor sees his writing as a “ritual” is clear, for he pens the Preparatory

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Karl Keller also argues in “The Example of Edward Taylor” that Taylor was concerned with process, not only within the context of publication, but also within the context of spiritual reflection; that, in fact, these contexts overlapped for Taylor in the writing process. Keller writes,

I think it is important to emphasize that Taylor was concerned not so much with poems as products as he was with the production of poems; that is, not so much with the product as with the process, not so much with the Meditations as with meditating. He was, as Roy Harvey Pearce has noted, a man “in action” and a Taylor poem is “the act of a man whose imagination is now engaged in creating something.”

For the most part [continues Keller], Taylor deprecates his poems as products. [Taylor admits, for example.]

I fain would praise thee, but want words to do’t: And searching ore the realm of thoughts finde none Significant enough and therefore vote For a new set of Words and thoughts hereon And leap beyond the line such words to gain In other Realms, to praise thee: but in vain. (II.106)

As finished products his poems seem to him mere “blottings,” “wordiness,” a “syllabicated jumble,” “ragged Nonsense,” “Language welded with Emphatick reech.”

Though he does not explore the spiritual-symbolic implications of his reading of Taylor’s interest in the writing process, Keller does suggest what Charles Mignon states in “Edward Taylor’s ‘Preparatory Meditations’: A Decorum of Imperfections”—that Taylor considered his poetry as “inextricably related to his election” and that “if imperfect regeneration causes imperfect poetry (and thus a decorum of imperfection),” then “we might expect Taylor to have a complete disregard for canons of critical judgment that are themselves fallen” (1424). Keller’s suggested and Mignon’s stated concern with Taylor’s “rhetoric of propriety” also validates my use of dialectical method to read Taylor’s poetry, a methodological imperative I not only draw from Taylor’s rich intertextual patterning in his poetry, but also find suggested
Meditations to prepare his mind and heart to approach and administer the ritual of the Lord’s Supper. His work is symbolic in every sense, but his faith infuses these symbols with the Spirit of God.\(^99\)

Taylor’s words as Reflections of the Word:

Taylor’s Discourse with Christ “through a Glass Darkly”\(^200\)

in Keller’s claim that Taylor was more concerned with poetic process than with product (and publication) and in Mignon’s claim that Taylor approached the paradox of the Calvinist-artist as a poetic process in which he attempted to unfold the tensions between word and Word, sin and salvation. The process of unfolding tensions is inherently dialectical in its movement.

\(^99\) Again Taylor falls back upon the Pauline doctrine that “the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.” Paul writes of the ministry in and through Christ,

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;

Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away.

How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? (2 Cor. 3:5-8)

That Moses looked upon the glory of God and lived is at the heart of Paul’s message, for he compares the ministry of Moses to the ministry of Christ (and Christian ministers by extension) to say that Christ “removed the veil” of Moses in his ministry, and so Christian ministers ought to preach in the same Spirit:

Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech:

And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:

But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ.

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Cor. 3:12-14, 18)

Taylor works with this same image in “Mediation 23” and “Meditation 59,” in which Christ’s sacrifice removes the veil, or curtain, separating the sinner from the holiest of holies in the tabernacle of the Lord. Christ’s ministry and death meant the death of sin, and in bodily death, the believer achieves spiritual life, whereby he may look upon the face of God and live. Christian ministers’ living ministry, as Paul suggests, reveals profound spiritual mysteries in “great plainness of speech.” The stylistic propriety puritans generally (and Taylor more specifically) tried to achieve in their language practices took Paul’s “plain” style as both model and injunction, and Taylor’s poetry and preaching show that he mastered this style and internalized this injunction to such a degree that he could deliver profound spiritual mysteries in “great plainness of speech.”
Taylor’s tying the Lord’s Supper, as ritual symbolizing spiritual purification and communion with God through Christ, to his own language practices, as meditative ritual preparing him to approach and administer the sacrament, reveals his keen sense of writing as a form of *mediation*. His use of the twofold sacrifice in “Meditation 23”—“sacrificial” goat and “scapegoat”—further reinforces the Derridean sense that, for Taylor, writing is a process of disclosing meaning by deferring semiotic closure. At its most complex moments, Taylor’s intertextual patterning achieves disclosure without closure, which warrants a brief examination of Derrida’s notion of deferral in an essay whose images serve to illuminate the “movements” of Taylor’s poetry, even across the centuries that separate them. In one of his early essays, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” Derrida deconstructs the distinctions Plato draws in the *Phaedrus* between speech and writing, philosophy and rhetoric, philosophy and mythology, and other such dialectical pairings that, Derrida argues, Plato actually undermines by his own logic and rhetoric. Implied in the Greek etymology of Derrida’s title—“Plato’s Pharmacy”—is the twofold sacrifice Taylor explores in his very Derridean “Mediation 23,” for “pharmacy” comes from the Greek word *pharmakós* (φαρμακός), meaning human sacrifice or scapegoat. In Ancient Greek religious rites, slaves, cripples, or criminals were chosen from among the larger community at times of famine, invasion, plague, or simply “calendrical crisis” and either sacrificed—by being stoned, burned, or thrown into the sea—or scapegoated and expelled from the community in order to purify the

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200 The subtitle mixes metaphors much like Taylor himself does when he meditates upon Old Testament types’ fulfillment in New Testament antitypes. The subtitle brings together in this final section of Chapter 6 the substance of Taylor’s rhetoric of propriety: Christ’s sacrifice dramatized in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, which symbolizes the Christian’s social-spiritual communion with God in and through Christ. The subtitle echoes Taylor’s typological understanding of communion as at once embodying in Christ the OT Hebrews’ privileged sense of hearing the Word of God spoken and the NT Greeks’ privileged sense of seeing the Word’s appearance in the flesh. Both are in different senses humanity’s confrontation with the divine.

201 Typological rhetoric behaves in precisely this manner.
larger community and save it from imminent disaster. During the Thargelia (Θαργήλια), for example, which were Athenian agricultural festivals honoring Apollo, two Athenian men (pharmakoi) were escorted without the city and executed or banished to propitiate Apollo so that a good sun might shine on the community’s crops and bring a bountiful harvest.202

Derrida notes in “Plato’s Pharmacy” the semantic slippage or polysemic ambivalence in the development of the Greek word pharmakós into the term pharmakon (φάρμακον), an interesting use of which he cites in Plato’s Phaedrus. Derrida points out that it is in this dialogue that “Socrates compares the written texts that Phaedrus has brought along [with him] to a drug (pharmakon)” and that it is the “occult virtues” of the pharmakon, a “medicine” or “philter, which acts as both remedy and poison,” that lures Socrates without the city walls—the place where the scapegoat (pharmakós) was either executed or expelled:

Operating through seduction [writes Derrida], the pharmakon makes one stray from one’s general, natural, habitual paths and laws. Here, it takes Socrates out of his proper place and off his customary track.203 The latter had always kept him

202 Several literary historians and anthropological philosophers have examined the numerous references in Greek literature to the use of pharmakoi in ancient Greek religious purification rites to preserve societal catharsis and cohesion. See, for instance, Jan N. Bremer’s “Scapegoat Rituals in Ancient Greece” (1983), Walter Burkert’s Greek Religion (1985) and Structure and History in Greek Mythology (1979), and René Girard’s The Scapegoat (1986). Girard traces the origin of civilization and language to the religious rite of sacrificing the scapegoat—the “immolated victim” serving to ritualize the “instinctive prohibition” against murder, a prohibition which ushers in other prohibitive behaviors necessary to civilization and which serves as the “mimetic disruption” necessary to representation and symbolization (i.e. language). Girard uses the term “scapegoat mechanism” to describe the civilizing and linguistic effects brought about by the first victim. The term “scapegoat mechanism” Girard borrows from Kenneth Burke, who coined it in Permanence and Change (1935) and referred to it again in A Grammar of Motives (1940).

203 Derrida’s use of the terms “proper place” and “customary track” is an unmistakable reference to propriety. René Girard’s treatment of the pharmakós in The Scapegoat shows more clearly what Derrida’s treatment of the pharmakon merely suggests—that social propriety is wrapped up in religious rite or spiritual propriety. Recent archaeological evidence confirms Girard’s anthropological theory that religious ritual actually predates and motivates human settlement and civilization. In his New Yorker essay, “The Sanctuary,” Elif Batuman describes Göbekli Tepe, an ancient sanctuary built atop a mountain site near Ursa, which is in southeastern Anatolia, roughly thirty miles north of the Syrian border. Batuman notes that Ursa is “the city believed by Turkish Muslims to be the Ur of the Chaldeans, the birthplace of the prophet
inside the city. The leaves of writing act as a *pharmakon* to push or attract out of the city the one who never wanted to get out, even at the end, to escape the hemlock. They take him out of himself and draw him onto a path that is properly an *exodus*:

*Phaedrus*: Anyone would take you, as you say, for a foreigner being shown the country by a guide, and not a native—you never leave town to cross the frontier nor even, I believe, so much as set foot outside the walls.

*Socrates*: You must forgive me, dear friend; I’m a lover of learning, and trees and open country won’t teach me anything, whereas men in the town do. Yet you seem to have discovered a drug for getting me out (*dokeis moi tes emes exodou to pharmakon heurekenai*). A hungry animal can be driven by dangling a carrot or a bit of greenstuff in front of it; similarly if you proffer me speeches bound in books (*en bibliois*) I

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Abraham” (72). He also notes that “Ursa . . . has a Greek name, Edessa, under which it is enshrined in the Eastern Orthodox Church as the origin of perhaps the world’s first icon: a handkerchief on which Jesus wiped his face, preserving his image” (72). Here too is the location of Göbekli Tepe, which is “estimated to be eleven thousand years old—six and a half thousand years older than the Great Pyramid, five and a half thousand years older than the earliest known cuneiform texts, and about a thousand years older than the walls of Jericho, formerly believed to be the world’s most ancient monumental structure” (72). Batuman relates that archaeological evidence unearthed at Göbekli Tepe challenges many of the conclusions anthropologists have drawn about the formation of ancient civilizations, writing that the idea of a religious monument built by hunter-gatherers contradicts most of what we thought we knew about religious monuments and about hunter-gatherers. Hunter-gatherers are traditionally believed to have lacked complex symbolic systems, social hierarchies, and the division of labor to build a twenty-two-acre megalithic temple. Formal religion, meanwhile, is supposed to have appeared only after agriculture produced such hierarchical social relations as required a cosmic back story to keep them going and supplied a template for the power relationship between gods and mortals. The findings at Göbekli Tepe suggest that we have the story backward—that it was actually the need to build a sacred site that first obliged hunter-gatherers to organize themselves as a workforce, to spend long periods of time in one place, to secure a stable food supply, and eventually to invent agriculture. (72-74)
don’t doubt you can cart me all round Attica, and anywhere else you please. Anyhow, now that we’ve got here I propose for the time being to lie down, and you can choose whatever posture you think most convenient for reading, and proceed. (230d-e) (1835-36)

For all his playing with words in this essay, Derrida calls special attention to the biblical language implied in Socrates’s discourse. The biblion that Socrates terms a pharmakon calls up the pharmakós or “scapegoat”—the human or animal sacrifice that “underwrites” the very civilized discourse to which Socrates has grown accustomed. This kind of discourse happens among men of the town within the confines of the city, not among beasts of the open air and field without the city’s walls.

Derrida suggests in his analysis of Plato’s Phaedrus—specifically, his analysis of Socrates’s anxiety about being lured without the city walls by the written texts that Phaedrus carries along with him—that “writing-as-disclosure” occasions a glimpse at the mythology inherent in Socrates’s notion of philosophy and the ancient religious rite—the pharmakós—that informs the pharmakon. Derrida shows that without the city walls, Socrates occupies a liminal space in which the boundaries between mytheme and episteme blur in the grapheme as “icon” or “totem.” Derrida analyzes Socrates’s anxiety in this passage to show that one and the same suspicion envelops in a single embrace the book and the drug, writing and whatever works in an occult, ambiguous manner open to empiricism and chance, governed by the ways of magic and not the laws of necessity. Books, the dead and rigid knowledge shut up in biblia, piles of histories, nomenclatures, recipes and formulas learned by heart, all this is as foreign to living knowledge and dialectics as the pharmakon is to medical science. And myth to true knowledge. In dealing with Plato, who knew so well on occasion to treat myth in
its archeo-logical or paleo-logical capacity, one can glimpse the immensity and
difficulty of this last opposition. The extent of the difficulty is marked out—that
is, among a hundred others, the example that retains us here—in that the truth—
the original truth—about writing as a pharmakon will at first be left up to a
myth. 204

Derrida here refers to the myth of Theuth, which Socrates cites in the Phaedrus to show his
discomfort with writing as a medium for truth. Socrates sees an occult or magical undercurrent in
writing that carries him to the birth of civilization—a cultural unconscious—when human life
existed without city walls, legal prohibitions, foreign and domestic commerce, and polite
corversation. This undercurrent thus flows backwards through time, and Socrates recognizes in it
the anticivilizing tendencies inherent in the mytheme’s underwriting of the grapheme.

Once without the walls Socrates embarks upon an exodus, 205 a choice of words Derrida
finds especially significant when he introduces the Egyptian myth of Theuth, the inventor of
writing, and Thamus, the king-god of all Egypt who judges it, later in the essay. Socrates’s
reference to his being pulled without the city walls by the written word at once implies the literal
meaning of exodus as a “going-out,” the more suggestive meaning of exodus as a removal from
one’s “proper place” or “customary track,” and, for Derrida especially, the biblical meaning of
Exodus as the Israelites’ following Moses out of Egypt and into the wilderness, where Moses and
the Israelites were given the Decalogue as the law of God and where Moses wrote the Pentateuch
for successive generations of Hebrews. The Hellenic-Hebraic conflation Derrida achieves in
“Plato’s Pharmacy” would censure writing, at least in the mind of Plato, as a degraded form of

204 Derrida’s reference to the archaeological and paleological capacity of myth recalls the lesson of Göbekli
Tepe—that religious worship and the occult antedates and motivates civilization. The religious settlement
thus becomes the social settlement, which the course of European history would seem to corroborate in that
“secularization” becomes the tendency of “enlightened” societies.
205 Derrida does not miss yet another biblical association in Socrates’s telling Phaedrus, “Yet you seem to
have discovered a drug for getting me out (dokeis moi tes emes exodou to pharmakon heurekaenai).”
speaking that can only approximate the animation, dynamism, spirit, or sense of liveliness that characterizes speech. For Plato, says Derrida, writing is the re-presentation of speech, and something of the speaker’s presence is lost in this representation. Edward Taylor acknowledges and equally decries in “Meditation 43” the degradation of his own writing, by which he seeks the presence of God in and through the Scriptures. Perhaps it is more fitting to say that Taylor writes upon the Scriptures (again, recalling the palimpsest image of the Prologue) and notes that his written words degrade the living, spoken Word:

When, Lord, I seeke to shew thy praises, then

Thy shining Majesty doth stund my minde.

Encramps my tongue, and tongue ties fast my Pen,

That all my doings, do not what’s designd.

My speeches Organs are so trancifide

My words stand startld, can’t thy praises stride. (lines 1-6)

The living presence of God and his spoken Word stuns Taylor much like it at first stunned the Old Testament prophets, leaving his tongue “cramped” and his words inarticulate. His pen too is also “tied,” so that he cannot trace the designs disclosed in the Word of God. Taylor uses metaphors of closure, constriction, and confinement to articulate the “prison-house” of language in which he works—his mind “stund,” his tongue “Encramp[ed],” his pen “tie[d],” his speech organs “trancifide,” his words “stand[ing] startld,” unable to “stride” God’s praises. Taylor’s attempts to disclose God’s glory thus run up against semiotic closure.

Taylor muses on the nature of writing in “Meditation 43” much like Derrida does in “Plato’s Pharmacy.” Derrida argues that “A spoken speech—whether by [the Greek orator] Lysias or by Phaedrus in person—a speech proffered in the present, in the presence of Socrates,
would not have had the same effect” as the pharmakon or written texts Phaedrus has brought along with him. Derrida writes that

Only the logoi en bibliois, only the words that are deferred, reserved, enveloped, rolled up, words that force one to wait for them in the form and under cover of a solid object, letting themselves be desired for the space of a walk, only hidden letters can thus get Socrates moving. If speech could be purely present, unveiled, naked, offered up in person in its truth, without the detours of a signifier foreign to it, if at the limit an undeferred logos [a Greek word spanning “word,” “speech,” “story,” “reason,” and even God in the Logos] were possible, it would not seduce anyone. (1836)²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva both examine the psychosomatic overlap between language and desire. In Revolution in Poetic Language, for instance, Kristeva develops the terms “symbolic,” “semiotic,” and “thetic” to characterize the place of the speaking-writing subject. Poetic subjectivity, Kristeva argues, borrows upon the creative potential of the semiotic chora, a theoretical site of ever-shifting meaning that resembles Lacan’s “Signified” and Freud’s “Unconscious.” The poetic subjectivity—the “I am”—occupies the “thetic,” the always-tense liminal space between symbolic and semiotic. Working in symbols that contain the semiotic, the poetic subject always risks being overwhelmed by the semiotic. Indeed, says Kristeva, the symbolic cannot contain the semiotic, which spills over its symbolic container, leaving remnants, traces or remainders of meaning in the spaces between syntactical units. For rhetoricians, this tension might be more simply characterized as the problem of invention and perhaps disposition. For Taylor, this tension is the problem of the Calvinist poet who would know God in order to praise God with all his heart, but for his fallen reason and the degraded language tools with which he works:

This Curious pearle, One Syllable, calld LIFE,
    That all things struggle t’keep, and we so prize
I’d with the Edge of sharpend Sight (as knife)
    My understanding Sheath anatomize
But finde Life far too fine, I cannot know’t.
My Sigh too Dull; my knife’s too blunt to do’t. (2.80, lines 1-6)

Taylor’s Taylor laments his inability to “anatomize”—to dissect in order to master, contain, or know—the mystery of life, which he adds is so simple a word, merely “One Syllable.” Life is a “Curious pearle,” a “prize” possession one “struggle[s] t’keep,” says Taylor, but he suggests that, like the pearl, its source and center are hidden from him. His mental “Sight” is too “Dull” and his language instruments are “too blunt” to penetrate these mysteries. Interesting that Taylor treats the discursive limits of his understanding in psychosomatic terms: that the life-spirit that animates the body might be anatomized like the body. Taylor already knows that the tools he would use to anatomize the body are misapplied here; that they are inappropriate, of course, suggests that Taylor is concerned with propriety in this stanza. Taylor opens “Meditation 79” treating the conditions under which he might know and thus praise God rightly: “Had I Promethius’s filching Ferula / Filld with its sacred theft the stolen Fire: / To animate my Fancy, lodg’d in
Socrates concludes from his examination of the written word that it seduces because it defers presence, communion, or full disclosure, covering it over with the “solid object” that is the written word itself. Taylor’s fondness for the palimpsest image—his writing over the Scriptures—suggests that he too views writing as a deferral of “unveiled” presence, communion, or full disclosure of God through Christ, whose physical presence Taylor sees in the Word-made-flesh of the Scriptures and the bread and blood of the Lord’s Supper. Taylor works with the “veil” and “curtain” motifs from the Scriptures and very often refers to his language use—particularly his metaphors—as “shabby clothing” in order to show that the “unveiled” or “naked” truth of perfect communion with Christ can only be achieved in crossing the liminal space between life and death, which he imagines in some poems as stepping across the threshold of the curtain onto holy ground in the tent of the tabernacle, in other poems as talking to God in naked truths or perfect plainness of speech, and in still other poems as being hugged, along with all of humanity, into the body of Christ. Taylor’s “desire,” which, if Derrida were to read his poetry, he would find registered in Taylor’s discursive movements, in his “running to and fro” among the various images and types across the Scriptures, is a desire for spiritual subsumption into God, which he expresses, fittingly enough, as a desire for perfect rhetorical propriety—that is to say, Taylor’s complete transcription and understanding of the Word of God.  

clare” (lines 1-3). His emphasis on “theft” in these lines—“filching,” “theft,” “stolen”—reveals his proprietary concern that, like Prometheus’s fire, any understanding he possesses is not his to own; rather it is granted to him by the grace of God. He closes the stanza with a conflation of life-spirit and spirit of understanding: “But it thy Love, My Lord, shall animate / My Clay with holy fire, ‘t will flame in state” (lines 5-6).

207 In his “Meditation 79” on Canticles 2:16, “My beloved is mine and I am his,” Taylor employs the rhetoric of propriety, which reveals his desire for God’s full disclosure of the terms of the covenant of grace:

What wilt thou change thyselfe for me, and take
In lew thereof my Sorry selfe; whereby,
I am no more mine own, but thine, probate,
Thou not so thine, as not mine too, thereby?
Dost purchase me to be thine own, thyselfe
In “Meditation 43,” Taylor carefully distinguishes between thought and speech, and speech and writing, and remarks upon the seeming degradation of the living spirit from thought to spoken word, and from spoken word to written word:

Words Mentall are Syllabicated thoughts:

Words Orall but thoughts Whiffl'd in the Winde:

Words Writ, are incky, Goose quill-slabbed draughts:

Although the fairest blossoms of the minde.

Then can such glasses cleare enough descry

My Love to thee, or thy rich Deity? (lines 13-18)

The concatenated series, or syntactical links, Taylor creates with his use of anaphora in the first three lines of this stanza—“Words Mentall,” “Words Orall,” and “Words Writ”—suggests at once the syntactical progression from thought word to oral-aural word to written word and the syntactical nature of human thought as “Syllabicated,” which Taylor decries as the discursive

And doest exchange for mee, thyself, and wealth? (lines 13-18)

Taylor asks why Christ would offer himself in recompense for his sin, why Christ would “own” the debt that is Taylor’s to pay. Taylor is aware that this trading of places suggests a rhetorical impropriety predicated on an economic metaphor (or economic impropriety), which he represents in his use of chiasmus in the first line of the next stanza—a fitting figure of speech for representing Christ’s sacrifice on the cross and his willingness to change places with Taylor:

I’m Thine, Thou Mine! Mutual propriety:

Thou giv’st thyself. And for this gift takest mee
To be thine own. I give mysele (poore toy)
And take thee for myne own, and so to bee.
Thou giv’st thyself yet dost thyselfe possess,
I give and keep myselfe too nerethless. (lines 19-24)

Taylor uses the language of logic later in the poem to describe his understanding of subsumption, again using chiasmus to show the “mutuall claim” he and Christ have upon one another: “Thine mine, mine Thine . . . Mine, thine, are Predicates unto us both” (lines 31-32). In these lines, Taylor expresses the mystery of complete communion as perfect social-spiritual propriety—as “strang appropriations” wherein Christ “giv’st [him]self yet dost [him]selfe [still] possess” and Taylor “give and keep [him]selfe too nerethless.”
limits of his reason and imagination. The mind and Word of God are infinite and eternal; Taylor’s thoughts are circumscribed by syntax and its literal marking of time’s progression in the unfolding of each sound or letter’s meaning. Taylor’s sentences have beginnings and ends, yet he achieves texture in this poem’s sonic qualities, with his repetition of “Words” in lines 13-15 and his repetition of “thoughts” in lines 13-14, as well as with his use of alliteration and half rhyme in lines 14-15: “Words Orall but thoughts Whiffld in the Winde: / Words Writ, are incky, Goose quill-slabbred draughts.” Taylor closes the stanza once more using the image of the glass, which distorts the Lord’s image in Taylor’s mind since Taylor can only reflect (upon) the Lord as “through a glass, darkly” (1 Cor. 13:12). Even though Taylor’s words—“Mental,” “Orall,” and “Writ”—are the “fairest blossoms of [his] minde,” still he asks whether “such glasses [are] cleare enough [to] descry / My Love to thee, or thy rich Deity?” (lines 17-18).

Taylor’s pun on “descry” serves as fitting place to conclude this chapter, for unpacking the meanings that Taylor compresses in this one word discloses the dialectical method I have used, and the many theories I have borrowed upon, to read Taylor’s poetics. First, implied in the word “descry” is the passive-active movement that McKenna himself “descries” in the Greek term prepein, meaning “to appear before the eyes,” or “to be seen conspicuously,” the term he offers as the etymological starting point of his theoretical examination of rhetorical propriety. “Descry” means both “to make out or to catch sight of” and “to discover by looking carefully, to discern, to detect.” The first meaning of “descry”—“to make out or catch sight of”—suggests that the observer merely marks or coincidently notes something on the horizon or periphery of his perception, which of course implies that the observer perceives this object passively as it leaves its impression upon the mind. This first meaning of “descry” aligns with the first meaning of prepon, as “that which appears before the eyes.” In his etymological analysis of prepein, McKenna locates propriety—as “that which is fitting or appropriate”—with the object of
perception—“that which appears before the eyes.” That the observer notes its “fittingness” serves as the transition between a characteristic residing in the object of perception to a characteristic the perceiving subject discerns from among the object’s other qualities, which leads to the second meaning of “descry” as “to discover by looking carefully, to discern, to detect.”

This second meaning suggests an active projection of mind upon the object of perception, in which the observer changes into a “speculator” and shifts from merely marking or noting this characteristic of the object to actively remarking upon this characteristic. This meaning of “descry” also aligns with the second meaning of prepon, as “that which is seen conspicuously.” The quality or characteristic that is seen “conspicuously,” that has attracted special attention and stands out from among the other qualities or characteristics of the object of perception, very often comes to stand for the very thing itself in the mind of the observer. By a kind of metonymic logic, this quality, in other words, represents the whole object of perception—Taylor’s “inky letters” representing his poetry, for example. In discerning this outstanding quality or characteristic from among the object’s other qualities and characteristics, the observer-turned-speculator focuses on the outstanding quality or characteristic and turns it into its own object, seemingly independent of its relations to the object’s other qualities and characteristics. This one outstanding quality or characteristic never loses its original significance in relation to the thing from which it has been plucked, even as it gets associated, by a kind of metaphorical logic, with the outstanding qualities or characteristics of other objects—Taylor’s “inky letters,” for instance, representing his poetry, yet suggesting his “darkened” reason. The comparison of course implies others: “darkened” reason suggests “clouded” imagination or mental sight, the very sight needed to create clear images in his poetry; “darkened” reason also suggests fallen understanding or mental sight stained by sin (Taylor’s breaking of God’s law); finally, the “darkened” image suggests the Paul’s phrase, βλεπομεν γαρ αρτι δι εσοπτρου εν αινιγματι (blepomen gar arti di esoptrou en ainigmati)
“For now we see through a glass, darkly”—the “αἰνιγματί” (ainigmati) or “enigma” serving as the object of Talyor’s speculation: whether “such glasses [are] cleare enough [to] descry / My Love to thee, or thy rich Deity?” (lines 17-18).208

It is no surprise that Taylor references Paul’s metaphor in this line, for in directing his ministry to the conversion of the Gentiles, Paul drew upon the language and cultural materials of ancient Greece. Several writers, St. Augustine among them, have noted the Platonic bent of Paul’s (and other apostles’) thinking, as well as some of the tensions present in Hebraic-Hellenistic conflation Paul works to achieve in his writings.209 Derrida’s “Plato’s Pharmacy” offers one of several readings of ancient oral cultures’ anxiety over the written text, which of course includes the Scriptures.210 The presence implied in oral-aural exchange cannot be replicated by the written word, which defers meaning in “logoi en bibliois, [in] words that are deferred, reserved, enveloped, rolled up, words that force one to wait for them in the form and

208 A talented linguist, Taylor would not have overlooked the association of “letter,” “law,” “logic,” and “literature” in the Greek word logos.

209 In his Confessions, for example, Augustine admits the crucial role the books of Platonists played in his conversion: “Through a man puffed up with monstrous pride [i.e. Manlius Theodorus, a Neoplatonist who patronized Augustine at the time of his conversion], you [God] brought under my eye some books of the Platonists, translated from Greek into Latin. There I read, not of course in these words, but with entirely the same sense and supported by numerous and varied reasons, ‘In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.’” (121). Although Augustine labels Paul the “least” of the apostles in his Confessions, through his conversion he comes to understand Christian inversion, in which the “least” of apostles comes to have the greatest effect on him: “With avid intensity I seized the sacred writings of your Spirit and especially the apostle Paul. Where at one time I used to think he contradicted himself and the text of his words disagreed with the testimonies of the law and the prophets, the problems simply vanished…In surprising ways these thoughts had a visceral effect on me as I read ‘the least’ of your apostles” (1 Cor. 15:9) (130).

210 Walter Ong examines orality in his book The Presence of the Word. Ong is especially interested in how ancient oral cultures like those of the Hebrews and Greeks thought of sacred space as somehow invested with the power and presence of the spoken Word of God. Derrida’s “logoi en bibliois [which] . . . let themselves be desired for the space of a walk” describes well the intertextual patterning and typological rhetoric underwriting Taylor’s poetics. The paraphrastic impulse inherent in Taylor’s discoursing on the Scriptures Taylor himself represents in the palimpsest image in his Prologue.
under cover of a solid object, letting themselves be desired for the space of a walk” (1836).\textsuperscript{211} Derrida’s analysis reveals that Plato thought that the written word charms an otherwise clear mind, clouding the perception like a “drug” or pharmakon, which not only means “perfume or intoxicant,” “remedy and poison,” but also means “sacrament and talisman.” In “Plato’s Pharmacy,” then, Derrida unpacks these various meanings that Plato compresses in his reference to the written word as pharmakon: First, like a “drug,” “perfume,” or “intoxicant,” the written word acts like a charm to Socrates’s mind, for it contains the power of attraction and pleases by deferring its disclosure of meaning. It piques Socrates’s desire, drawing him out of his “proper place” and off his “customary track” by taking him (on an exodus) without the city walls—the place of the pharmakós, the scapegoat. This place of human sacrifice (by execution or exile) suggests to Derrida (though it is Girard who articulates it) a “return of the repressed”—the “immolated victim” serving to ritualize the “instinctive prohibition” against murder, a prohibition which ushers in other prohibitive behaviors necessary to civilization and which serves as the “mimetic disruption” necessary to representation and symbolization (i.e. language). Socrates thus views writing as a kind of “magical talisman” or “sacramental rite,” which covers over or contains the scapegoat.\textsuperscript{212} If the sonic similarities between pharmakon and pharmakós suggests to Derrida a cultural unconscious, when human life existed without city walls, legal prohibitions, foreign and domestic commerce, and polite conversation, surely Plato would not have missed it, given that he is thinking on the margins of orality and literacy.

Taylor’s ritualized approach to writing in his meditations, which prepare him to approach the ritual of the Lord’s Supper, cannot but call up the associations Derrida unpacks in “Plato’s

\textsuperscript{211} My emphasis. Derrida’s reference to meaning as “under the cover of a solid object” suggests both the word closed in the book or rolled up on parchment and the meaning hidden in written characters or contained in written letters.

\textsuperscript{212} Taylor juxtaposes the scapegoat (the OT animal sacrifice) and Christ (the NT human sacrifice) to reflect upon the Old Law’s completion in the New Dispensation.
Pharmacy.” Taylor everywhere decries (i.e. proclaims his denouncement of) his writing, which covers over and darkens with “icky” blackness the “Christall leaves” that Taylor at once understands as Christ, the Word-made-flesh, the “palimpsest” upon which he writes his letters of praise, the “underwriting” that motivates and informs his own writing. He decries, in other words, what he would otherwise descry in these “Christall leaves,” the pharmakon and pharmakós—the written Word and human sacrifice—that discloses his origin in God. In writing upon the “Christall leaves,” he catches glimpses of God’s glory in the spaces between his words, as he seeks to trace more clearly and properly the face he sees through the glass. Whether the letters darken Christ’s countenance, or Taylor discovers in them merely his own distorted reflection(s), pen strokes twisted by sin, he cannot but question whether his own words can be “such glasses cleare enough descry” the face of God; nevertheless, Taylor knows that it is the place of the Calvinist preacher-poet to persist in the writing process as part of his vocation, ever hoping and praying for the proper words to open the Scriptures to himself and his congregation and, through these words, catch a glimpse behind the curtain that veils the holiest of holies in the tent of the tabernacle, trace his reflection upon God’s countenance, peer beyond the “hall of mirrors” that is his poetic subjectivity, and escape the “prison-house” of language that traps him in the infinite regress of his own poetic imagination. Taylor persists in his poetic discourse upon (his typological running to and fro across) the Scriptures—movements which create intertextual enigmas or mazes—that he might one day achieve complete disclosure and perfect communion with God through Christ.213 Taylor thus rests (or rather runs) on his promise to God that “I shall thy praise under this shadow sing.”

213 Paul’s phrase “For now we see through a glass, darkly” (blepomen gar arti di esoptron en aigmati) (1 Cor. 13:12) is itself “enigmatic.” The KJV translators’ rendering of “esoptron” as “glass” suggests the Latin speculum, which was used for the purposes of divination, prophesy, and spiritual introspection. In The Rhetoric of Propriety, Stephen McKenna treats the two different kinds of “looking” implied in the Greek
work prepein, from which derives the word “propriety,” as at once “outwardly projective” and “self-motivated”—a looking outward, as in discernment and rational judgment, and a looking inward, as in having a vision or in meditating. In *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, Martin Jay links seeing to speculation, speculation to theorizing, theorizing to totality-thinking in the Marxist sense:

What might be called the alternating traditions of *speculation* with the eye of the mind and *observation* with the two eyes of the body provided fertile ground for the varieties of ocularencentrism that have so deeply penetrated Western culture . . . Speculation can be construed as the rational perception of clear and distinct forms with the unclouded eye of the mind or as the irrational and ecstatic dazzlement by the blinding light of God, the “vision” of the seer. Here a metaphysics of light could turn into a full-fledged mysticism of light. Observation could be understood as the unmediated assimilation of stimuli from without, the collapse of perception into pure sensation. Or it could be construed as a more complicated interaction of sensations and the shaping or judging capacity of the mind, which provided the Gestalt-like structures that made observation more than a purely passive phenomenon. (29-30)

Jay traces more clearly the inward-outward ambiguity of ocular experience: “Plato argued [for example] that the eye and the sun are composed of like substance, and the Greeks believed that the eye transmitted as well as received light rays (the theory of extramission).” Like McKenna, Jay concludes that “there was a certain participatory dimension in the visual process, a potential intertwining of viewer and viewed” (30).

In his reference to the Gestalt as a complicated interaction between visual sensation and mental discernment, Jay adds that *theorizing* has a speculative quality:

Mindful of this possibility, Hans-Georg Gadamer has in fact contended that *theoria* was not as completely disengaged and spectatorial as was more modern scientific epistemology. Instead, it contained a moment of “sacral communion” beyond mere disinterested contemplation. “Theoria,” [Gadamer] argues, “is a true sharing, not something active, but something passive (pathos), namely being totally involved in and carried away by what one sees. It is from this point that people have tried recently to explain the religious background of the Greek idea of reason.” (Gadamer 111; qtd. in Jay 31)

Jay also suggests in his reference to the Gestalt that it implies the totalizing moves inherent in speculative philosophy: “Rather than implying the distance between subject and object, the specular tradition in this sense tended to collapse them. As Rudolph Gasché has argued in *The Tain of the Mirror*, the reflection of the speculum was potentially an absolute one” (31). Gasché contends that “unlike reflection, which, as a function of understanding, perpetuates division and absolutely fixed opposition, absolute reflection, or speculation, deliberately pursues a totalizing goal” (54). Jay summarizes Gasché’s notion of speculation as a desire for “specular sameness” with God:

That is, speculation could mean the pure knowledge of self-reflection, a mirror reflecting only itself with no remainder. Later in medieval Christianity, the materiality of the human mirror, or the mirror of creation, as it was known, could be subordinated to the divine mirror in which only perfect truth was reflected. Dante in the *Paradiso* was able to describe his journey as a transition from the *speculum inferius* of man (the glass through which we see only darkly) to the *speculum superius* of heavenly illumination. [Or as Gasché articulates this desire for totality,]

Speculative thought is grounded in this reflecting mirroring of what is positively in opposition. It coincides with the reciprocal mirroring and unification of the conflicting poles. The mirroring that constitutes speculative thought articulates the diverse, and the contradictions that exist between its elements, in such a way as to exhibit the totality of which this diversity is a part [i.e. the Gestalt]. Speculation, then, is the movement that constitutes the most complete unity, the ultimate foundation of all possible diversity, opposition, and contradiction. (Gasché 44; qtd. in Jay 32)

Jay’s understanding of speculative philosophy as aiming to achieve a moment of “sacral communion” with the divine certainly illuminates the totalizing moves Taylor makes in his meditative verse. As Jay points out, it was Aristotle who wrote in his *Poetics* that “To produce a good metaphor is to see a likeness”
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(1459a, 7-8; qtd. in Jay 33), and Taylor’s desire for perfect clarity and propriety in his figures and types betrays a desire for “specular sameness” with God. Like St. Paul, however, who achieved a conflation of Hebraic and Hellenistic cultural and language materials in his ministry of the Word to the Gentiles, Taylor overcomes the “oral-centricity” of the Hebrews and the “ocular-centricity” of Greeks. Jay examines the pair side-by-side: “If the Jews could begin their most heartfelt prayer, “Hear, O Israel,” the Greek[s] . . . were in effect urging, “See, O Hellas” (33). Taylor sang that he might hear God’s call—“I am this Crumb of Dust which is design’d” (Prologue, line 13)—and wrote that he might answer that call—“I’m Thine, Thou Mine! Mutual propriety:” (2.79, line 19). The “I am” in both lines resounds Moses’ answer, “here I am,” to God’s call and anticipates Moses’ looking upon the face of God during his writing of the Law—a place of complete propriety and perfect communion.


Edward Taylor devoted the last forty years of his life composing many of his finest poems in the *Preparatory Meditations*, but the seeds of his mature poetic voice, which he spent a lifetime cultivating in his meditations, are buried in his early work and sprout up in the occasional poems he continued to write alongside his more substantial *Gods Determinations* and *Preparatory Meditations*. Taylor’s earliest poetry, write Thomas and Virginia Davis in their introduction to *Edward Taylor’s Minor Poetry*, “is not yet for him a way of reordering and defining his experience” (xii). The poems appear to be defined by standard Puritan attitudes toward life and experience, and the verse forms Taylor works in, such as the acrostic and elegy, set limits to his poetic reach. The Davises are quick to observe, however, that “it is the minor poetry which substantially contributed to the kind of poet [Taylor] became” in the *Preparatory Meditations*. The Davises trace Taylor’s poetic development in brief in their introduction, marking a pivotal change in Taylor’s verse during the period when he began paraphrasing the Psalms. Taylor’s “wooden paraphrases” of the Psalms, say the Davises, were important for Taylor’s poetic development beyond the quality of the verse: “First, they are an almost literal reenactment of the poetic interests of the first generation . . . . Second, they provide for Taylor the open-ended form, the mode of process and not product . . . . Finally, unlike any of the earlier poetry, the Psalm paraphrases direct Taylor toward the meditative voice” (xiv). The first and third reasons the Davises offer to support the significance of the Psalms for Taylor’s development propose that Taylor reordered his experience “within the framework of biblical and historical
precedent,” realizing his role as heir to the first generation’s errand into the wilderness and meditating upon the Puritan plantations’ place in divine providence.

On the one hand, Taylor’s historical inheritance shaped his ministry to the Westfield congregation, so-called because of its Western-most situation in the Massachusetts Bay Colony plantation, on the border of the frontier. In his biblical meditations, on the other hand, Taylor shapes in turn his sense of historical, social, and spiritual place and the sense of propriety that attends it. Taylor realizes his ministry to the wilderness congregation and responds to the disintegration of the Puritan errand in the second generation by realizing a free-ranging poetics predicated on the Scriptures’ typological rhetoric. This rhetoric releases Taylor from the formal constraints of acrostic and elegiac verse forms that he had been experimenting with in his early poetry, for the acrostic, “however elaborate, is [still] self-contained; [and] elegies begin and end in the nature of the subject” (xiv). The typological rhetoric Taylor achieves in his later meditations reveal this freedom of movement outside the formal limits of his early acrostic verse, past the syntactical limits of his early “wooden paraphrases” of the Psalms, and beyond both the occasional limits of his elegiac verse and the historical limits of his wilderness ministry. Taylor’s fashioning of an open-ended form and preference for process over product was long in developing; indeed, it was a process of cultivating the “peculiar eloquence” of the Scriptures from the vantage afforded him by his place in the Puritan plantation, the Puritans’ place in history, and Puritan history’s place in the Christian narrative as the unfolding of divine providence.214 Taylor’s later verse reveals a poet taking ownership of his historical inheritance and reflecting

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214 Karl Keller develops the point about Taylor’s preference for process over product in The Example of Edward Taylor. Raymond Craig traces Taylor’s poetics to the “peculiar eloquence” of the Scriptures in “The ‘Peculiar Elegance’ of Edward Taylor’s Poetics.” Taylor’s rhetoric in the Preparatory Meditations I discuss in Chapter 6, Part 2 “The Propriety of Place in Edward Taylor’s Preparatory Meditations” as Taylor’s reflections on the propriety of place—social and spiritual—in his approach to and administering of the Lord’s Supper. In this chapter, I treat the development of this rhetoric of propriety in his early acrostic and occasional verse.
upon it as, at once, a trial and gift from God. Taylor gives expression to his poetics of place and
the rhetoric of propriety that informs it in the *Preparatory Meditations*, but he begins cultivating
this rhetoric in his early acrostic and occasional poetry.

What is remarkable about Taylor’s early poetry is not its quality (as the Davises observe),
but rather its providence, for echoes of Taylor’s early verses can be found in the *Preparatory
Meditations*. These echoes suggest that Taylor was already beginning to fashion in his early
poetry the rhetoric of propriety that comes to inform his sense of historical and biblical place and
moment in the *Preparatory Meditations*. The anxieties that Taylor felt about his approach to the
Lord’s Supper, he also felt about his wife Elizabeth, and Taylor’s writings to her and about her
reveal a rehearsal of the rhetoric of propriety he would deploy in his religious verse. In a love
letter and acrostic poem he sent to Elizabeth during their courtship, Taylor expresses his devotion
to her in terms similar to those he uses to express his devotion to God through Christ in his
religious verses. He cautions Elizabeth not to interpret his words as merely “one of Loves
Hyperboles.” Rather, he admits that he can find no “fitter Comparison to set out [his] Love by,”
however elaborate and exaggerated the metaphor may be. Taylor writes,

> Looke not (I entreat you) on [these lines] as one of Loves Hyperboles, if I
borrow the Beames of Some Sparkling Metaphors to illustrate my Respects unto
yourselfe by. For you having made my breast the C[a]binet of your Affections (as
I yours, mine) I know not how [to] use a fitter Comparison to set out my Love
by, than to Compare it unto a Golden Ball of pure Fire rowling up & down my
Breast, from which there flies, now & then a Sparke like a Glorious Beam from
[the] Body of the Flaming Sun. But I, alas! Striving to Catch these Spar[ks] into a
Love Letter unto yourselfe, & to guild it with as with a Sun Beam, finde that by
what time they have fallen thro’ my Pen upon my Paper, they h[ave] lost their
Shine, & fall onely like a little Smoake thereon instead of guildin[g it.] (lines 6-
15)

The “Sparkling Metaphors” in these lines Taylor echoes at various places in the Preparatory
Meditations, where he expresses the same anxieties about his ability to praise rightly his love and
devotion to God. In the final stanza of Meditation 1 from the First Series, for instance, Taylor
writes that

Oh! that Thy Love might overflow my Heart!

To fire the Same with Love: for Love I would.

But oh! my streight’ned Breast! my Lifeless Sparke!

My Fireless Flame! What Chilly Love, and Cold?

In measure Small! in Manner Chilly! See.

Lord blow the Coal: Thy Love Enflame in mee. (lines 13-18)

In his letter to Elizabeth, Taylor refers to his love as a “Golden Ball of pure Fire rowling up &
down [his] Breast,” having no “fitter” comparison to describe his emotion. The image recalls the
sun-Son imagery that Taylor uses at various places in the Preparatory Meditations to describe his
love and devotion to Christ. In Meditation 1.1, Taylor prays to Christ to “Enflame” the “Lifeless
Spark,” the “Fireless Flame” that has grown cold in his “streight’ned Breast” that Taylor might
return to Christ’s love in the same measure and manner. The conceit reflects Taylor’s concerns
about the stylistic improprieties—the “Sparkling Metaphors”—with which he adorns his love
letter to Elizabeth. Taylor is anxious that he cannot return to Elizabeth in the appropriate measure
and manner the love she has offered him, Elizabeth’s “having made [Taylor’s] breast the C[a]binet of [her] Affections (as [he hers, his])” (line 8). Taylor recalls the love letter’s image of dying embers and sparks grown cold in several of his meditations, but in his reference to the “cabinet” of affections from which these sparks fall, he refers not only to his own love, but the love of Elizabeth that inflames it. The superabundant love for humanity that God has embodied in Christ, Taylor cannot hope to embody in his own heart, so that he needs God’s grace to make his offering suitable. The same appears true of Elizabeth’s love: Taylor’s heart, the “cabinet” or “embodiment” of Elizabeth’s affections, bursts with sparks that fall down “thro’ [Taylor’s] Pen upon [his] Paper” and, losing their shine in the descent, appear on the paper “like a little Smoake” that blackens it “instead of guildin[g it]” (lines 14-15).

Taylor’s appeal to the cold cabinet of his heart, which cannot suitably requite the love of God and Elizabeth in its own “embodiment” or “expression,” reveals the trajectory of Taylor’s rhetoric of propriety: his keen awareness of the social impropriety he commits when his style does not return the gift of love and grace he receives. Taylor laments the economic impropriety (his debt) as a stylistic impropriety (the graceless lines in which he expresses his love). Taylor compresses his concern about economic propriety into an elliptical phrase that suggests the love he would requite, or rather the stylistic grace and eloquence with which he would requite it: “For you [Elizabeth],” writes Taylor, “having made my breast the C[a]binet of your Affections (as I yours, mine) I know not how [to] use a fitter Comparison” than the “Sparkling Metaphors” that lose their shine when they fall upon the paper.\(^\text{215}\) Taylor’s elliptical phrase “I yours, mine” implies that the affections he returns, or rather the words he uses to requite Elizabeth’s love, are unsuitable, and his use of ellipsis in other contexts suggests that Taylor continued to reflect upon connections between discursive and economic exchange in his writing. Taylor develops his

\(^{215}\) My emphasis.
rhetoric of propriety by examining his want of stylistic grace as being underwritten by the good grace of others, among them Elizabeth and Christ. In another love poem he wrote to Elizabeth, “Were but my Muse an Huswife Good,” Taylor closes the poem remarking on his signature:

I make my Pray’re, who do my selfe Subscribe

Thine whilst Mine Own: & yet mine Own whilst Thine

Thou being Mine alone, I’m Thine, & Mine.

Edw: Taylor (lines 62-65)

Taylor suggests that his “Subscription,” which implies his verses’ “stylistic signature” as much as it implies his moral character and identity, is on its own insufficient and requires Elizabeth’s own moral character and identity to “underwrite” it. Taylor refashions the recipient of his ineloquent verses into a giver of good graces and eloquence throughout the poem, proposing that his marriage to Elizabeth—his hopeful “Muse an Huswife Good”—might lend his lines the grace they presently want. Not only does the poem’s final elliptical phrase—“I’m Thine, & Mine”—resound the elliptical phrase “I yours, mine” in his letter to Elizabeth, but also the syntactical turns Taylor makes in these lines—“Thine whilst Mine Own: & yet mine Own whilst Thine . . . I’m Thine, and & Mine”—anticipate Taylor’s use of chiasmus to characterize the debt he owes to God’s grace incarnated in Christ. In Meditation 79 of the Second Series, on the Canticles 2:16, “My beloved is mine and I am his,” Taylor employs the rhetoric of propriety to “come to terms” with the covenant of grace:

What wilt thou change thyselfe for me, and take

In lew thereof my Sorry selfe; whereby,
I am no more mine own, but thine, probate,

Thou not so thine, as not mine too, thereby?

Dost purchase me to be thine own, thyselfe

And doest exchange for mee, thyself, and wealth? (lines 13-18)

Taylor asks why Christ would offer himself in recompense for his sin, why Christ would “own” the debt that is Taylor’s to pay. Taylor is aware that this trading of places suggests a rhetorical impropriety predicated on an economic metaphor (or economic impropriety), which he represents in his use of chiasmus in the first line of the next stanza—a fitting figure of speech for representing Christ’s sacrifice on the cross and his willingness to change places with Taylor:

I’m Thine, Thou Mine! Mutuall propriety:

Thou giv’st thyself. And for this gift takest mee

To be thine own. I give myselfe (poore toy)

And take thee for myne own, and so to bee.

Thou giv’st thyself yet dost thyselfe possess,

I give and keep myselfe too nertheless. (lines 19-24)

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216 Taylor’s reflection on Christ’s willingness to “trade places” with him is the main thrust of the Preparatory Meditations; it is the central message of the Scriptures and motive of the Lord’s Supper. I examine in Chapter 6, Part 2, “The Propriety of Place in Edward Taylor’s Preparatory Meditations,” Taylor’s use of the “Looking Glass” image not merely as a metaphor for his reflections on Christ’s sacrifice, which he prepares to observe in the ritual of the Lord’s Supper, but also as a metaphor for his reflection of Christ’s sacrifice in his administration of the Lord’s Supper. In his meditations, Taylor grapples with the impropriety of representing Christ’s ministry in his own, which he imagines in some of the poems as his failures at tracing Christ’s outline or image in the glass and in other of the poems as his failures at tracing his own words on the Word of God as they appear in “Christall leaves” of the Scriptures. Taylor thus reveals his anxieties about economic impropriety, which is the debt he owes to God by trading places with Christ, and it is Taylor’s clear sense of this debt that motivates his desire to “commune” with Christ during the Lord’s Supper that he might give thanks and glorify God. Taylor is painfully aware, however, that he cannot “meet” Christ, which suggests both social and stylistic impropriety in that Taylor’s words cannot meet or requite God’s gift in Christ (i.e. the stylistic impropriety) nor adequately represent Christ’s face and character to Taylor (i.e. the social impropriety).
Taylor uses the language of logic later in the poem to describe his understanding of subsumption, again using chiasmus to show the “mutual claim” he and Christ have upon one another: “Thine mine, mine Thine . . . Mine, thine, are Predicates unto us both” (lines 31-32). In these lines, Taylor expresses the mystery of complete communion as perfect social-spiritual propriety—as “strang appropriations” wherein Christ “giv’st [him]self yet dost [him]selfe [still] possess” and Taylor “give and keep [him]selfe too nerethless.”

Taylor thus recalls in Meditation 79 the “mutual propriety” upon which he predicates his proposal to Elizabeth at the end of his love poem “Were but my Muse an Huswife Good.”

Taylor’s recalling this sense of “mutual propriety” in Meditation 79 is certainly fitting given that Taylor takes Canticles 2:16, “My beloved is mine and I am his,” as his source text. In both poems Taylor reflects upon the Canticles’ romance of Christ and his church as bridegroom and bride, wedded in the “communion” ritual of the Lord’s Supper. Even in his early poetry, then, is

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217 Taylor also makes explicit reference to the believer’s “propriety” in Christ in *Gods Determinations*:

So Faith is easy till the Soule resolves
To Live to Christ, and upon Christ rely.
Then Saving Faith he bold presumption Calls,
Hast thou (saith he) in Christ propriety?
The Faithfuls Faith, he Stiles Presumption great,
But the Presumptuous, theirs is Faith Compleat. (1693-98)

Taylor treats “Christ’s propriety” under the heading “Some of Satans Sophestry,” saying that the Enemy would call the Christian’s “share” in Christ’s sacrifice “presumption”; however, this share is precisely what “completes” the Christian’s faith, that is, in God’s grace and mercy incarnated in Christ’s earthly ministry. See below my explication of Taylor’s reference to “Conjugall Love” in his love letter to Elizabeth as exceeding all other love largely because the grounds of such love are “Christian Charity” or “Conjugall sharing.” Taylor also closes his poem “Were but my Muse an Huswife Good” with a “conjugal sharing” of his identity with Elizabeth—their marriage union being an earthly expression of Christ’s love for his Church, symbolized in the central sacrament of communion.

218 Taylor draws on similar Canticles imagery in Meditation 1.1 of the First Series, in which he juxtaposes finite conjugal love and the infinite spiritual love of the bridegroom Christ:

What Love is this of thine, that Cannot bee
In thine Infinity, O Lord, Confinde,
Unless it in thy very Person See,
Infinity, and Finity Conjoyn’d?
What hath thy Godhead, as not Satisfide
Mar’de our Manhood, making it its Bride? (lines 1-6)

This stanza compresses many of the metaphors I see already developing in Taylor’s early poetry, which I discuss at greater length below. Taylor’s use of the Canticles imagery in this meditation he also uses in his
Taylor meditating on the communion ritual as the “crux” of social and religious propriety for the Puritan community. In “Were but my Muse an Huswife Good,” Taylor invokes the image of the goodly housewife as inspiration for his lines, through which he communicates both his earthly and spiritual aspirations for marrying Elizabeth:

Were but my Muse an Huswfe Good, & could
Spin out a Phansy fine, & Weave it Would
In Sapphick Web, & Cloath my Love therein,
I’de Carde the rowls, She should the Phansy Spin.
But I no Rowling Phansy have to run,
Nor She Such Silken Huswrfry ere Spun.
Hence Coarse Iämbick is the finest she
Can weave, my Love arrayed in to bee. (lines 1-8)

Taylor characterizes his style as mixing homely metaphors through “Coarse Iämbick” meter, little befitting his love of Elizabeth, whose own love song, says Taylor in his preamble to the poem, his poem “were [merely] an Eccho, back again unto [her] Song.” Taylor’s echo of Elizabeth’s love song anticipates the “mutual propriety” with which he closes and signs the poem: Taylor “subscribes” the poem “Thine . . . Edw[ard] Taylor,” but his offering of himself to Elizabeth is no mere letter-writing convention. Taylor examines the generic convention “forever yours” as more than a social nicety expressing his sense of decorum. The sense of “mutual propriety” with which Taylor closes the poem implies the Christian marriage ideal Anne Bradstreet proposes in the love letter and love poems to Elizabeth, in which he treats his and Elizabeth’s conjugal love and union as an earthly expression of their spiritual love and communion with the bridegroom Christ. Taylor also employs a “rhetoric of containment” in both his early love poems and later meditations to liken the superabundance of his and Elizabeth’s affection for each other to God’s superabundant grace and mercy in Christ’s incarnation and sacrifice. Taylor’s earthly and spiritual affections exceed the “cabinet” of his heart and, indeed, overwhelm his words as “containers” of his emotions, just as God’s affections for humanity exceed man’s understanding.
opening line of her poem “To My Dear and Loving Husband”: “If ever two were one, then surely we.” Taylor proposes to join himself entirely to Elizabeth, as if his loving words, having been inspired by her, were merely her loving words echoed back again unto her. Taylor thus echoes his proposal at the poem’s opening also at its closing, “[I] do myselfe Subscribe / Thine whilst Mine Own: & yet mine Own whilst Thine / Thou being Mine alone, I’m Thine, & Mine” (lines 62-64). The chiastic turn Taylor makes in line 63—“Thine whilst Mine Own: & yet mine Own whilst Thine”—not only echoes, or rather reflects, the line’s beginning in its ending, but also transposes Taylor’s identity, which is both his own identity and Elizabeth’s (and Elizabeth’s is both her own and his) even while they stand alone. The pledge he here makes amounts to a marriage proposal.

The sense of social propriety upon which Taylor predicates his examination of economic propriety in the poem’s final lines also suggests, as his fitting use of chiasmus indicates, his and Elizabeth’s spiritual relationship under God in and through Christ. In fact, Taylor devotes much of the poem to reflecting upon their future union as an expression of their devotion to God, and to reflecting upon the consummation of their marriage union as an expression of their communion with Christ. Taylor thus anticipates a more complete or perfect rhetoric as a result of their union: “That long’d for Web of new Relation, gay” (line 13). Taylor’s quadruple pun on the “Web of new Relation” signifies the coarse and homely wedding cloth he imagines his future bride spinning and wearing on their wedding day, “Cause She no Silken Huswife is, yet” (line 11); his “Coarse lämbick” verse in which he dresses his expressions of devotion and love for Elizabeth,

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219 The Greek letter Χ is the first letter in the name of Christ: Χριστός, Khristós. Taylor’s style mirrors his spiritual reflections upon his marriage proposal to Elizabeth. I will return to Christ as bridegroom below. For readings of the image of Christ the bridegroom in Taylor’s poetry, see Thomas Marion Davis’s A Reading of Edward Taylor, specifically his fourth chapter, “Series 2: The Types and the Canticles.” See also Jeffrey Hammond’s “The Bride in Redemptive Time: John Cotton and the Canticles Controversy,” “A Puritan Ars Moriendi: Edward Taylor’s Late Meditations on the Song of Songs,” and “Approaching the Garden: Edward Taylor’s Progress toward the Song of Songs.” See also Prudence Steiner’s “A Garden of Spices in New England: John Cotton’s and Edward Taylor’s Use of the Song of Songs,” Duckhee Shin’s “Mystical Spirituality in Edward Taylor’s Canticle Poems,” and Karen Rowe’s “Sacred or Profane? Edward Taylor’s Meditations on Canticles.”
hers too for him being coarse and homely because it is earthly love; the marriage union between Taylor, Elizabeth and their respective relations; and finally, their more perfect union under God in and through Christ’s sacrifice for his church. Taylor compresses all of these senses of “Web” into his “Web of new Relation,” and though he recalls each sense throughout the poem, he returns most often to the more perfect Web “That must be wove upon our Wedden Day” (line 14). Taylor invests his and Elizabeth’s marriage union with images of Christ’s sacrifice and the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. These images of Christ relieve Taylor’s anxieties that the “coarse cloth” that represents Elizabeth’s dress, his verse, and their love might be perfected: Elizabeth’s dress, now spun with “Hearts golden Fleece, Spun into finest twine . . . Shines like a Web of fulgent gold” (lines 16-17), and their love, woven into the fabric, “With folds of Hearts . . . More pleasant . . .
With Honours, Duties, & with pleasure right, / And Faithfulness, [they two] Stand like pearls, & Smile / On one an other Shining all the While” (line 18, 20, 22-24). For all their wedding day happiness, however, Taylor understands that their love is imperfect, material love, and much like the “Lisping Musick” of their wedding day and Taylor’s verses, it requires the proper direction:

Taylor makes two references in this poem to the “lissing music” of his verses (lines 19 and 30). His use of the metaphor here anticipates his use of it in his later poetry, where the “lisp” likewise represents his inadequate praise of God in his verses. See Thomas Davis’s A Reading of Edward Taylor. Davis traces the image of the lisp to Meditation 26.1, which Davis observes is Taylor’s “first identification of shoddy poetry with sin” (163). Davis also observes that Taylor echoes the image in Meditations 43.2 and 43.1: “Meditation 43.2 begins with the identical image with which Meditation 43.1 ends: the ‘shining Majesty’ of Christ ‘tongue ties’ (in the earlier poem, ‘tongue is tide’) the poet’s desire to praise” (163). The final couplet of Meditation 43 in Series 1 is “Till when I cannot sing, my tongue is tide. / Accept this Lisp till I am glorified.” For other treatments of Taylor’s anxieties about the style of his poetry, see Jeffrey Hammond’s “A Puritan Ars Moriendi: Edward Taylor’s Late Meditations on the Song of Songs.” Hammond points out at the opening of “A Puritan Ars Moriendi” that “[r]ecent studies have identified Edward Taylor’s ongoing concern with the basic artistic challenge faced by all religious poets: how to praise God sufficiently with the inherently flawed vehicle of human language” (191). I would add to the aesthetic problem of the religious poet who aims to praise God and yet cannot find the adequate words, which perhaps makes his praise ineffective, the antecedent rhetorical problem of how even to address God. The rhetorical problem of how to address God precedes the aesthetic problem of how to praise God, for the poet is presented with an unconventional social situation in either case. With what means can he praise God, much less address God, in appropriate terms? Hammond observes that Taylor ultimately realizes particularly in his later meditations that the poet’s aesthetic problem “would resolve itself in the soul’s future; [that] all ineffective praise would be corrected in heaven and the lisp of the earth-bound poet would...
Yet here a richer Veane of Excellence
Darts thro’ this Wealthy Web, & Sparkles: Whence
A Pillar doth of dazzling glory rise
With pious Odours, for a Sacrifice
As bundles of the Flaming Sunbeams fly
To glorify whom all Should glorify
This Glory darts its Web, & Divine
Him with a Direct, That with a Reflect Shine. (lines 27-34)

Taylor introduces the “vein of excellence” at precisely the point in the poem where he addresses his and Elizabeth’s earth-bound love as a place where “Cares, & Crosses too amongst these [many pleasures] meet” (line 25). Taylor acknowledges the cares that attend any marriage, but also that he and Elizabeth ought to “meet” these cares that “cross” their pleasures by reflecting on whether their pleasures are “meet.” Taylor’s concern is with the propriety of their pleasure, that it is directed toward proper religious ends. He puns not merely on “meet,” but on “cross,” as both the material burdens that cut across and interrupt marital bliss and the cross of Christ’s “Sacrifice” (line 30) woven into the fabric of their marriage, toward which they ought to direct the pleasure and happiness of their union in “sacrifices of praise.”

be eliminated once he is transported to glory” (191). For the time being, the poet must resign himself to his flawed praise and merely look to the moment when his praise would be perfected in heaven, and it is this aspect of futurity or anticipation that Hammond notices at the heart of Taylor’s later meditations, which he argues is Taylor’s way of preparing his soul for death. For other references to Taylor’s concern with metaphors of “earth-bound praise,” see Robert Daly’s God’s Altar: The World and the Flesh in Puritan Poetry, in which Daly argues that Taylor “found the metaphorical bridge necessary but ultimately unsatisfactory, and often hungered for the second bridge to unlock his poetry as the first had not” (176). See also Charles Mignon’s “Edward Taylor’s Preparatory Meditations: A Decorum of Imperfections,” in which Mignon argues that Taylor anticipated his stylistic inadequacies would be perfected in heaven. See Barbara Lewalksi’s Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric, pp. 249 and 423. See William Scheick’s The Will and the Word: The Poetry of Edward Taylor, in which Scheick maintains that “only in heaven will the saint’s heart, perfected by grace, evidence the unqualified obedience requisite to consummate practical piety” (113). See also Scheick’s “Nonsense from a Lisping Child: Edward Taylor on the Word as Piety.”
Taylor refers to Christ as the “vein of excellence” (line 27) that “darts” (line 28) into the now wealthy fabric of their wedding union and perfects it with sparkling glory, Christ’s divinity carrying the “Direct . . . Shine” toward which Taylor and Elizabeth direct their praise in communion that their marriage union might carry a “Reflect Shine” (line 34). Taylor of course closes the poem with his “subscription” to “mutual propriety,” but he offers one last admonition to Elizabeth and himself—that they will

by walking right

Loves brightest Mantle make Still Shine more bright

For then its glory Shall ascend on high

The Highest One alone to glorify.

Which rising will let Such a glory fall

Upon our Lives that glorify them Shall. (lines 55-60)

In this stanza, Taylor recalls the homely cloth with which he opened the poem and to which he appeals in the preceding stanza as “black . . . Hair-Cloth” of material woes “all Snick Snarled run . . . A Smoke from Hell, as black as Death doeth rise” (lines 46, 48). By “walking right[ly]” in the way of God, which is Taylor’s appeal to the social propriety of their marriage and to the religious propriety that guides their steps in this union, he and Elizabeth will discard the homely wedding cloth of their pending union, defer the possible “black . . . Hair-Cloth” of material cares, and clothe themselves instead with the “Effulgent Web” that radiates with the glory of Christ’s sacrifice. By turning their care and attention instead to glorifying God through their marriage, his and Elizabeth’s married life together will be glorified in return. Taylor thus anatomizes the sense of “mutual propriety” with which he closes his poem: the exchange of glory up to and down from God being the economic propriety that ensures marital happiness.
Taylor’s reference to “Sparkles” and “Sunbeams” in “Were but my Muse an Huswife Good” echoes the “Sparkling Metaphors” and “Sunbeam love” to which Taylor refers in his love letter to Elizabeth. There too does Taylor take up the substance—and propriety—of truly religious conjugal love. Taylor again itemizes, presumably for himself as much as for Elizabeth, reasons for why “Conjugall Love ought to exceed all other L[ove]” (lines 24-25). First, conjugal love “represents” the love that exists “betwixt Christ & his [Church] Eph. 5.25” (lines 26-27). Taylor points out the differences in kind between conjugal and Christian love—the former being human, limited, and subordinate to the latter, which is divine, boundless, and transcendent; however, Christian love stimulates or invigorates conjugal love, much like a “Cordiall” warms the body (29). Taylor’s reference to Christian love as a “Cordiall” that invigorates conjugal love again anticipates his use of the same metaphor to reflect upon his participation in the feast of the paschal lamb in Meditation 2.71: “Let holy Charity my heart Cement / Unto thy Saints: and for a Cordiall high, Make mee a partaker of thy sacrament” (lines 38-40). Taylor puns on the sense of cordial in both places as “courteous, gracious, or warm reception” and “strong, sweetened, aromatic liquor, or stimulating medicine” to propose that “Charity” or Christian love, symbolized by the blood of Christ in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, “Cements” lovers’ hearts together in their earthly conjugal union and saints’ spirits together in the hereafter. This points leads to Taylor’s second—that “Conjugall Love is the ground of Conjugall Union, or Conjugall [sharing,] the Effect of this Love is also the ground of this union” (lines 31-33). Taylor’s reference here to “Conjugall sharing” reverberates with the sense of “mutual propriety” with which he “Subscribes” (line 62) “Were but my Muse an Huswife Good” as well as the “mutual claim” he and Christ have upon one another in Mediation 79: “Thine mine, mine Thine . . . Mine, thine, are Predicates unto us both” (lines 31-32). Christian love thus becomes the “ground” upon which all conjugal love is “predicated.”
Taylor concludes his list of reasons with a brief sketch of the Christian duties incumbent on those entering into conjugal union: “S[erving] God together, Praying together, a Joyning in the Ruling & Instruction their Fam[i]ly] together . . . . B[ut] also a mutuall Giving Each other to Each other; & a mutuall Succouring each other in all States, Ailes, Grievances” (lines 35-39). This list of Christian duties Taylor also offers in “Were but my Muse an Huswife Good” as the means by which conjugal lovers defer care, grief, and woe: “If Duty, Faith, & Love be ragged worn / Then Honours, Pleasures, Priviledges torne” (lines 37-38). In both letter and poem, Taylor likens the exercise of Christian duty as an expression of conjugal love to the harmonies produced by the strings of an instrument well-tuned together. In the letter, Taylor writes,

And truly, if persons in this State [of conjugal union], have no[t] love each for others exceeding all other Love, it’s with them for the most part as with the Strin[gs] of an Instrument not tuned together, which when struck upon, make but a jarring, harsh Sound. But when the golden Wire[s] of an Instrument equally drawn up, & rightly Struck up[on sou]nd together, make a sweet musick whose harmony doth enravish the Eare, so when the golden strings of true Affection are screwed up into right Conj[ug]all Love, thus Sweetly doth this State then harmonize to the co[m]fort of each other, & to the glory of God, when Sanctified. (lines 40-48)

Taylor contrasts the images in his letter to the images in his poem to instruct both himself and Elizabeth in the consequences of neglecting true Christian duty and Charity as an expression of Christian love:

If Duty, Faith, & Love be ragged worn

Then Honours, Pleasures, Priviledges torne,

Ly gasping, & the Lisping Musick Deare
The Pretty Harps play, jars, & wounds the Eare.

The golden thrids, those Heart Strings (to be briefe)

Chafe, Gaul, & fretting breake, for very Griefe. (lines 37-42)

Taylor’s metaphors clearly overlap in both the letter and the poem. Taylor likens conjugal love’s harmonies, which are produced by Charity’s proper exercise, to “the golden Wire[s] of an Instrument [which when] equally drawn up, & rightly Struck up[on sou]nd together.” Neglecting Christian duty, however, produces discordant sounds, which like “the golden thrids, those Heart Strings . . . Chafe, Gaul, & fretting breake, for very Griefe” and in breaking “jars, & wounds the Eare.”

Taylor’s itemized list of reasons why conjugal love exceeds all other loves is both poetic and didactic, which suggests that even in his early poetry, Taylor is concerned with process, not product. He envisions his poetry as a medium through which to clarify his understanding of Christian doctrine. Taylor’s overlapping of references to the harmonies of conjugal love in both letter and poem anticipates the reflective uses to which he put his poetry in the Preparatory Meditations. His concern with the stylistic propriety of his poetry in Meditation 54 of the Second Series, for instance, recalls the images he develops in his love letter to Elizabeth and his poem “Were but my Muse an Huswife Good.” More specifically, Taylor recalls the “golden Wire[s]” of his letter and “golden thrids” of his poem in the lines of his meditation: “Untun’d, my Lord. My Cankard brassy wire / ‘S unfit to harp thee Musick” (lines 1-2). Taylor also recalls the doctrine of his love letter and poem, respectively, in this meditation, for he takes as the source text of Meditation 54 Matthew 28:18 “All Power is given mee in Heaven, and in Earth.” The gospel passage warrants Taylor’s definition of conjugal love as being “underwritten,” or rather “circumscribed,” by the love of Christ for his Church. Like his marriage proposal to Elizabeth, Taylor requires the grace of God to make his words “sound” harmoniously, his words being
otherwise “unfit to harp [God good] Musick.” Taylor’s concern with the “fittingness” or propriety of his words thus extends beyond his religious reflections about properly addressing or approaching God in the ritual of the Lord’s Supper. This is not to say that Taylor “idolizes” Elizabeth as much as it is to say that he began realizing the emotional character of Christian love and devotion in other facets of his life, and gave them poetic form much earlier than the Preparatory Meditations. This is also to say that his early poetry also functioned, much like the Preparatory Meditations, as language instruments Taylor played upon to fine tune his understanding of Christian doctrine and develop an appropriate set of figures and tropes as commonplaces for preaching and opening the Scriptures’ doctrine to his congregants. The paraphrastic and didactic impulse motivating even his early love poetry to Elizabeth reveals Taylor’s reflections as “preacherly” in their intent. Indeed, even Taylor’s explication of the excellences of conjugal love in his love letter to Elizabeth develops by the tripartite structure—doctrine, reasons, uses—indicative of Puritan preaching.

Like much of Taylor’s early and later poetry, his love letter to Elizabeth opens and closes with a sense of rhetorical propriety. At the letter’s opening, Taylor is at first concerned about how Elizabeth might perceive his letter’s rhetoric, which, “lest [his] Letter should be judged the Lavish Language of a Lovers p[en]” (23-24), he chooses instead to transition to an argument on the spiritual propriety of conjugal love. He closes the letter with similar feelings of anxiety, having just expounded the earthly duties and delights of conjugal love as an expression of Christian duties by whose exercise the believer hopes for heavenly delights. In the letter’s conclusion, Taylor cautions himself and Elizabeth that their love can never exceed their love of God: “though Conjugall Love must exceed all other,” writes Taylor, “yet it must be kept within bounds too. For it must be Subordinate to Gods Glory” (49-50). The limits of conjugal love to which Taylor here refers in the closing of his letter he also proposes at various places in his
poetry. Everywhere in his discourse, poetical or rhetorical, Taylor is aware of the stylistic, rhetorical, social and economic propriety that “prescribes,” “subscribes” (or “underwrites”), and “circumscribes” his words as reflections of the Word of God in the Scriptures and in Christ. Coupled with the “Prologue” to the Preparatory Meditations, in which Taylor sets up the “reflective logic” that will serve as his major argument and general approach to the sacrament of Lord’s Supper, other of his meditations refer to God as “Scribe” and the Scriptures as His Word revealed in Christ.221 In “Another Meditation at the Same Time,” which Taylor develops from Meditation 5 of the First Series on Canticles 2.1 “The Lilly of the Vallies,”222 Taylor compresses in his imagery the different senses of propriety that underwrite his reflections on Christ. In the second stanza of what is, coincidently, one of Taylor’s shorter poems, Taylor asks Christ,

\begin{quote}
Am I new minted by thy stamp indeed?

Mine Eyes are dim, I cannot clearly see.
\end{quote}

221 See Chapter 6, Parts 1 and 2, “The Propriety of Placing Edward Taylor’s Poetry” and “The Propriety of Place in Edward Taylor’s Preparatory Meditations” for a fuller treatment of Taylor’s “Prologue.” Taylor reveals the importance of the paraphrastic motive of his writing in his “Prologue” to the Preparatory Meditations, in which he refers to the Word of God in the Scriptures as “Christ-all leaves” upon which the poet “Write[s] in Liquid Gold . . . /[His] Letters till thy glory forth doth flame” (lines 10, 17-18). The emphasis on Christ is mine. The italics reveal Taylor’s pun on “crystal,” which anticipates his lament later in this same poem that his “inky” letters blot and blacken God’s “Letters” in the Scriptures. Taylor nevertheless proposes that the glory of the Scriptures’ Letters shines through his meager attempts to represent them in his poetry.

222 Fittingly enough, Meditation 5 follows “The Reflexion,” in which Taylor imagines himself as a “bidden Guest” (line 5) sitting across from Christ—his “reflection”—who is seated “at the Table Head above” (line 1). Taylor closes the poem drawing together images of place, sight, and writing:

\begin{quote}
    Shall not thy golden gleams run through this gloom?
    Shall my black Velvet Mask thy fair Face Vaile?
    Pass o’re my Faults: Shine forth, bright Sun: arise
    Enthrone thy Rosy Selfe within mine Eyes. (lines 39-42)
\end{quote}

“The Reflexion” appears in a sequence of meditations on the romantic imagery of the Canticles: Christ as “bridegroom,” “Rose of Sharon,” and “Lilly of the Vallies.” Taylor compresses in all of these images his desire for communion with Christ, who is simultaneously the object of Taylor’s imaginative perception and reflection, the incarnated or embodied Word of God, and the perfect face or image Taylor desires to trace in his poetry. Taylor is keenly aware of the propriety of each image—its stylistic, rhetorical, social, spiritual, and economic connotations.
Be thou my Spectacles that I may read

Thine Image, and Inscription Stampt on mee.

If thy bright Image do upon me Stand

I am a Golden Angell in thy hand. (lines 7-12)

The question with which Taylor opens the stanza suggests economic propriety in his likening himself to a “newly-minted” coin bearing the stamp or image of Christ. Taylor proposes that Christians generally are Christ’s “currency,” Christ’s means of discursive and economic exchange in his earthly and heavenly kingdoms. So newly minted, Taylor particularly understands that Christ’s economic propriety informs Christians’ ethical practice, closing the first line with “minted by thy stamp indeed.”

Taylor’s appeal to Christ’s authorizing image or “stamp” backing his actions suggests the ancient Greeks’ notion of propriety implied in the verb prepein, meaning “to be seen conspicuously” and “to appear before the eyes.” In his book The Rhetoric of Propriety, Stephen J. McKenna analyzes the etymology of the word prepein in Greek philosophical and rhetorical tradition, concluding that the Greeks used the word prepein especially where “stylistic propriety” was meant, and that the word proposes a kind of seeing that is at once “outwardly projective” and “self-motivated” (27). Taylor suggests this active-passive dialectic in his opening question, “Am I new minted by thy stamp indeed?” Certainly, Taylor identifies himself as a Christian, so that his deeds ought to bear the stamp of Christ; however, it is part of the Calvinist spiritual condition not to put faith in works alone, but rather to read them as signs expressing salvation through faith in the Word. Taylor captures in his opening question the active-passive dialectic of the Calvinist poet, who searches for signs of election even though he cannot be sure of his salvation. Taylor
inverts the syntax “Am I” not just to signal the interrogative mood, but also to question the self-assertive “I am”—the name of God in Exodus—to represent simultaneously the Authority that backs his words, which are the materials of his vocation, and his acceptance of the vocation itself as a minister of God’s Word in his preaching and poetry. As he does in other meditations, Taylor questions the propriety of these exchanges, which have no spiritual value without the stamp of Christ. In order to deliver Christ in the Scriptures or in the ritual of the Lord’s Supper, then, Taylor realizes he must first receive Christ.

Taylor reinforces his examination of the Calvinist spiritual condition in the stanza’s first line by transitioning in the second line to suggest the “ocular” quality of propriety that McKenna traces to the Greek verb prepein. Taylor likens his uncertainty about his Christian ethos—that his words and actions are indeed indicators of his spiritual condition—to dim eyesight whereby he struggles to read Christ’s “Inscription Stampt on mee” (line 10). Taylor puns on the word “Inscription,” in which he reads Christ’s image “backing” his words, the currency of his vocation and the means he would use to procure his and his congregants’ spiritual salvation; furthermore, Taylor’s appeal to Christ as both the “Spectacles” enabling him to read “Thine Image,” which is also Christ, proposes that Christ is both means and end. As the incarnated Word of God in the Scriptures, Christ subscribes, underwrites, or “backs” Taylor’s words as a preacher and poet. Christ also circumscribes Taylor’s sphere of life and activity as a Christian, for Christ “frames” Taylor’s way of seeing himself as a deliverer of God’s Word. Taylor closes the poem’s second stanza answering the question with which he opens the poem—“Am I thy Gold?” (line 1)—but answers the question conditionally: “If thy bright Image do upon me Stand / I am a Golden Angell in thy hand” (lines 11-12). Taylor’s “Golden Angell,” meaning both the gold coin still in circulation in England during the reign of Charles I and Taylor himself as a messenger of God’s glory, still requires Christ’s “bright Image” as its standard.
In the poem’s third and final stanza, Taylor reinforces his earlier proposition that Christ, who is the incarnated Word of God in the Scriptures, “inscribes” and “circumscribes” Taylor’s discursive exchanges. Once more, Taylor conflates discursive exchange and economic exchange, which reveals that Taylor’s understanding of Christian ethics and the sense of stylistic, rhetorical, and social propriety that informs it is “underwritten”—or rather “overwritten”—by God’s grace realized in Christ, the Lord of both heaven and earth:

Lord, make my Soule thy Plate: thine Image bright

Within the Circle of the Same enfoile.

And on its brims in golden Letters write

Thy Superscription in an Holy style.

Then I shall be thy Money, thou my Hord:

Let me thy Angell bee, bee thou my Lord. (lines 13-18)

Taylor begins and ends the stanza with Christ, the “Lord,” whose name circumscribes or encircles the stanza and reflects Taylor’s entreaty that the Lord “enfoile” his soul. Taylor desires to be wrapped with Christ’s sacrifice, an image that recalls Luther’s “dunghill blanketed with the snow of Christ’s sacrifice.” Taylor’s use of chiasmus in the meditation’s closing line—“Let me thy Angell bee, bee thou my Lord”—signifies at once Christ’s crucifixion and Taylor’s reflection of and upon it. As Christ’s “Angell” minister, Taylor ritualizes Christ’s sacrifice in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, a reflection of Christ’s earthly ministry. As poet meditating on Christ’s sacrifice, Taylor reflects upon Christ’s earthly ministry. These reflections reveal that the central concern of Taylor’s meditation is the stylistic and rhetorical propriety of his words. Just as Taylor
situates his soul at the center of the coin, so does he situate the Scriptures at the center of the poem’s final stanza, which inform his words, their style, and their rhetorical effect: “And on its brims in golden Letters write / Thy Superscription in an Holy style” (lines 15-16). Taylor thus seeks propriety in the Word, recognizing that the Word “overwrites” the words that are his soul’s expressions and exchanges.

The imagery of Taylor’s early poetry once again reveals that he had been reflecting on his relationship with Christ in much the same way and well before his writing style and poetic voice began to mature in his Preparatory Meditations. It bears repeating in the context of “Another Meditation at the Same Time,” which continues Taylor’s reflections on Christ in Meditation 5 of the First Series, that in his love letter to Elizabeth, Taylor turns from showing that conjugal love “exceed[s] all other L[oves]” (line 25) to cautioning that conjugal love ought not to exceed its earthly “bounds” or prescribed limits. Because the admonishment appears in a love letter, Taylor has the Canticles text in mind. He begins developing in his love letter and acrostic poem to Elizabeth the same “Word-as-circumscription” conceit that he later refines in “Another Meditation at the Same Time,” his extended reflection on Canticles 2.1 “The Lilly of the Vallies.” Taylor closes his love letter to Elizabeth anticipating its visual representation in an acrostic poem, which he calls the “Emblem” to his “Post.” The final paragraph of the letter reads,

[T]hough Conjugal Love must exceed all other, yet it must be kept within bounds too. For it must be Subordinate to Gods Glory. The which that mine may be so, it having got you in my Heart, doth offer my heart with you in it as a more rich Sacrifice, unto God through Christ & so it subscribeth

Your True Love till Death

Edward Taylor (lines 49-56)
Taylor expresses his sense of religious propriety—"For [our Conjugall Love] must be 
Subordinate to Gods Glory"—by a rhetoric of containment. Earlier in the letter, Taylor referred to 
his “breast” as “the C[a]binet of [Elizabeth’s] Affections (as I yours, mine) . . . know[ing] not 
how [to] use fitter Comparison to set out my Love by” (lines 8-9). He proposes that his heart 
contains Elizabeth’s affections much like hers does his, the “cabinet of affections” being the most 
appropriate image that comes to his mind. In the letter’s final paragraph, Taylor returns to the 
image of the “C[a]binet,” but now proposes that his sense of propriety renders it a gift to God. His 
compression of Elizabeth’s affections into his own in “mutual propriety”—“as I yours, mine”—
enrich Taylor’s gift of his heart to God, for “having got you in my Heart, doth offer my heart with 
you in it as a more rich Sacrifice, unto God through Christ” (lines 51-52). Taylor thus represents 
not just the limits of conjugal love by his rhetoric of containment, but also its propriety when he 
makes it a symbol of Christ’s sacrifice. Now transcending from earthly to spiritual offering, 
Taylor’s heart and the “mutual propriety” (of his and Elizabeth’s love) that his heart contains 
“subscribeth” the letter and returns “unto God through [the spiritual bridegroom] Christ” the gift 
of mercy and grace in Christ that God had given them. Again, Christ’s sacrifice underwrites 
Taylor’s sense of Christian love and charity.

“Emblem” to his “Post,” then, the acrostic poem accompanying Taylor’s love letter 
visually represents Taylor’s rhetoric of propriety, or rhetoric of containment, in the love letter. 
Taylor writes his words across an outer triangle representing the Holy Trinity, within which is 
contained what Taylor describes in the poem itself as “LOVES RING” (line 15)—the ring, of 
course, symbolizing his and Elizabeth’s marriage union as well as the eternal love of God that 
“rings” their conjugal love. Situated in the ring’s center is Taylor’s heart, or “cabinet,” radiating 
with his and Elizabeth’s affection for one another. Written upon the equilateral triangles top two 
edges is Taylor’s expressed devotion to the Holy Trinity: “THE RING OF LOVE MY
PLEASANT HEART MVST BE . . .” Written upon the triangle’s base, and thus serving as the basis or underwriting of Taylor’s love, is the thrust of Taylor’s argument in his love letter: “THE RING OF LOVE MY PLEASANT HEART MVST BE TRVELY CONFIND WITHIN THE TRINITIE.”223 Written along the upper half the inner ring is Taylor’s understanding of his and Elizabeth’s conjugal love and marriage union: “LOVS RING IS END . . .” Written along the lower half of the inner ring, however, is Taylor’s understanding of his and Elizabeth’s spiritual love and marriage union (i.e. communion) with Christ: “LOVS RING IS END THAT HATH NO END.”224 Taylor contains repetitions of his love’s expression—“THe Ring of Love (my PleAsant Heart) must bEE” (line 19)—within both the inner and outer rings, running line 19 of the poem into the triangle’s basis, which serves at once as part of the outer ring and line 20 of the poem: “TRVELY CONFIND WITHIN THE TRINITY.”

Taylor opens the acrostic portion of the poem, which runs from A to Z along the left-hand margin of the page, with “Aspiring Love” (line 1). Like the heart enclosed within the inner and outer rings, Taylor encloses within the lines of his poem the earthly love of Elizabeth to which he aspires:

[Hear]e you, (my FRIEND) this strenGTh’ned Wish of mine.

[If d]rosy SilVR should, I SHould by this,

Keep dull my POST, and staine my SErious Wish.

Lest which PolLUted bee, or th’ fEArfull Dove

My Post out FOyl’d I ruN a Ring of Love

223 My emphasis.
224 My emphasis.
New POLlist, where my cent’red heart DoTh reek

Out hiGhesT Steams of Love, which here Doe Meet

PreseNted tHus your Heart, LOVES RING yoV’ll finde

Quest I onlesse, Alwayes best BEfittS the minde.

ReseRve mine That. Yet let Our secreT breast

Set Love tHe Tune which tuNes this Ring the Best. (lines 8-18)

Taylor imagines that the style of his poem will give “new polish” to the “Sparkling Metaphors” of his love letter. Taylor’s fear is that his love letter’s rhetoric—its “dull and drossy silver”—might pollute his intentions and risk scaring Elizabeth away rather than drawing her into marital union. Instead of “foiling” his post in silver, then, Taylor embosses it with a shining emblem, his poem. The poem prevents Taylor’s letter’s being “foiled” by Elizabeth’s fear largely because the poem represents the letter’s rhetoric in visual form. Taylor hedges his “fEArfull Dove” within a “Ring of Love,” capturing her within the poem’s form and rhyme scheme much like the heart he presents to Elizabeth at the poem’s center contains his and her affections. Taylor circumscribes their conjugal love within “love’s ring,” upon which, says Taylor, Elizabeth will “finde / Quest I onlesse, Alwayes best BEfittS the minde” (lines 15-16). The line’s enjambment suggests that both Elizabeth and Taylor embark upon an “endless quest” symbolized in the ring that has no beginning and no end. Taylor appeals to the propriety of this quest, which “Alwayes best BEfittS the minde,” to set their minds toward the proper love of Christ, “tHe Tune which tuNes this Ring the Best” (lines 16, 18). Taylor puns on “ring” as representing both the outer ring of the Holy Trinity, the proper ring by which they “tune” the love of their “secreT breast” (to which Taylor
refers as the “cabinet” of their affections in his love letter), and the “ring” of his poetical style, which he tunes better to his affections than the rhetoric of his love letter.225

The “tune” of Taylor’s lines rings better than the rhetoric of his love letter largely because his verse allows him to write beyond the boundaries of his love letter’s rhetoric of containment. Among other sound qualities in the poem, such as repetition, consonance, and assonance, Taylor “tunes” his rhyme scheme to signify the “Aspiring Love” with which he opens the poem. At the poem’s crux, where he treats the reach of his aspiring love, Taylor uses the poem’s rhyme scheme to represent the heart image (i.e. the cabinet of affections) he places at the center of the poem. Taylor’s “heart cabinet” cannot contain his affections, which radiate outward from the center toward the inner ring much like his use of internal rhyme radiates outward toward the lines’ end rhymes:

Quest I onlesse, Alwayes best BEfittS the minde.

ReseRve mine That. Yet let Our secreT breast

Set Love tHe Tune which tuNes this Ring the Best. (lines 16-18)

225 In her essay, “‘Tuning’ the Song of Praise: Observations on the Use of Numbers in Edward Taylor’s Preparatory Meditations,” Ursula Brumm argues that Taylor studied Augustinian numerology and embraced Augustine’s idea that “the rule of numbers corresponds to God’s wisdom” (115). Taylor’s poetic style, says Brumm, arises from “th[e] concept of tuning his song on Christ” (116), which Taylor uses in several of his meditations to harmonize his words with the Word of God in Christ. Although Brumm does not draw a connection between Taylor and Augustine’s senses of stylistic propriety, she does point out that Taylor was especially interested in Augustine’s sense of “numerical proportions”: “Augustine [had discussed] in De musica the numerical proportions in music which he regarded as an analogy to all being, since all created things—the world, the soul of man, as well as music—are dominated by numbers. It can be assumed,” concludes Brumm, “that Taylor intended to suggest that this tuning was achieved with the assistance of sacred numbers which rule both the song and the harmony of the created world” (116). I discuss in Chapter 1, “Rhetorical Propriety in Augustine’s On Christian Doctrine,” Augustine’s sense of numerical proportion in his theories of music and language, both of which inform his sense of rhetorical propriety in his aesthetic, ethical, and moral theories. For another treatment of Taylor’s interest in numerology, see Karen Gordon Grube’s “The ‘Secret Sweet Mysterie’ of Numbers in Edward Taylor’s Meditation 80, Second Series.”
Taylor uses internal rhyme to direct Elizabeth’s attention first to what “best” befits the mind, which recalls the “endless quest” with which he opens the line; he then redirects her attention to the end rhymes that follow whereby the love of their “secret breast” becomes love’s ring the best. By suiting the poem’s style to its sense, Taylor brings stylistic and rhetorical propriety into close accord; as he says to Elizabeth when he instructs her in line 8 “[Hear]e you, (my FREIND) this strenGTh’ned Wish of mine,” he brings stylistic and rhetorical propriety into “tune” with one another.

Taylor’s “aspiring love” thus radiates outward from the center of his heart toward his earthly union with Elizabeth and beyond to his heavenly communion with God in the Trinity. Placing his and Elizabeth’s love at the center of the poem does not confine it to this space alone, for it aspires, “Wish[es]” (line 1), “desires” (line 5) to meet that which contains it. The central image of their hearts’ affections contained has always exceeded their container. They aspire to meet the inner ring, which in turn meets the outer ring at three separate places. Taylor’s desire is to marry Elizabeth, and their wedding union would serve as an expression of proper Christian love, devotion, and charity. Taylor therefore rings the lines in which he treats his desire for earthly union with Elizabeth with lines in which he treats his desire for communion with God in heaven. Taylor opens the poem,

Aspiring Love, that Scorns to hatch a Wish

[B]eneath itselfe, the fullest, chiefest Blisse

[C]ontain’d within HeavEns Chrystall Pale, & Shine,

[E]ct no more PresSented in desire;

[For H]eavens Roofe, aYe, lets not A wish soar higher. (lines 1-5)
Taylor admits that he desires beyond, not beneath himself, but that his desires end at “heaven’s roof.” Heavenly love completes or perfects earthly love. Taylor closes the poem,

Vpon your Hearte (I pray you) put Loves Ring

Vnerringly; Loves Swelt[ring] Hearte herein

Wearing a True-Loves-Knot at Centre’s set. 226

Where with I sent to you an Alphabet

Xenodick whence all Syllable compleat,

Xtracted are to spell what Love can speake.

Yea, See, then what I send: yet I design,

Zion my Ring shall Licen[c]e with her Time. (lines 21-28)

Taylor recalls, or rather reflects, at the poem’s end—“Yea, See, then [Elizabeth] what I send” (line 27)—the directive he gives Elizabeth when he opens his discussion of their earthly love:

“[Hear]e you, (my FRIEND) this strenGTh’ned Wish of mine” (line 8). The lines suggest the typological rhetoric of the Scriptures: “Hear, O Israel.” “See, Hellas.” Taylor proposes to Elizabeth that their earthly love might fulfill their spiritual desires. He therefore encourages her to put love’s ring upon her heart “unerringly”—that is, “unerringly” spell out all the syllables of his acrostic verses to read “what [his] Love can speake” (lines 26) and, once “compleat” (line 25),

226 Taylor recalls the image in his elegy to Elizabeth, saying “Some deem Death doth the True Love Knot unty” (line 5), but persisting by means of a rhetorical question, “Oh Strange untying! . . . What? / Can any thing unty a True Love Knot?” (lines 11-12). Taylor admits his pain at the untying of this knot, since his heart is bound to Elizabeth’s at the knot’s center. Death’s pulling upon string’s ends only makes the knot tighter, which is painful for Taylor’s heart, even as it brings his and Elizabeth’s hearts closer together. Taylor implies in this image his and Elizabeth’s heavenly reunion.
“unerringly” extract the poem’s central message: Taylor’s earthly “design” (line 27)—the ring/poem by which he proposes to Elizabeth—is contained within God’s providential designs. Taylor’s affections, his “Loves Swelt[ring] Hearte” (line 22), crosses the historical-biblical threshold where history and prophesy are fulfilled: “Zion my Ring shall Licen[c]e with her Time” (line 28).

In their Introduction to Edward Taylor’s Minor Poetry, Thomas and Virginia Davis observe that Taylor’s poetry matured into more “open-ended form[s]” (xiv). They state that Taylor himself matured into a poet concerned more with “process and not product” (xiv). They offer Taylor’s early interest in acrostic and elegiac verse forms as evidence of his anxiety, or perhaps his inability, to “fashion . . . his own experience in the framework of biblical and historical precedent” (xiv). However, Taylor’s occasional and acrostic verses suggest that his poetic voice began to mature much earlier than has been argued, for Taylor began discovering his poetic voice well before his Psalm paraphrases. The Davises argue that “unlike any of the earlier poetry, the Psalm paraphrases direct Taylor toward the meditative voice . . . [and because they] invite the poet to make poetry a central concern in his life . . . the paraphrases point directly to the Preparatory Meditations” (xiv). As Taylor’s acrostic verses show, Taylor understood that his historical and poetical “designs” (i.e. his proposal to Elizabeth) carried greater significance within the biblical framework of divine providence of “Zion’s Ring.” As his occasional verses show, Taylor’s poetry realizes the paraphrastic impulse much earlier than his “wooden paraphrases” (xiv) of the Psalms. Finally, Taylor echoes in the Preparatory Meditations many of the figures and tropes he uses in his early poetry. All this suggests that Taylor’s early poetry does indeed point to the Preparatory Meditations, the Meditations themselves being the culmination of a lifetime of preparation and reflection on the propriety of his calling.
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Conclusion

The Rhetoric of Propriety:

Towards a Dialectical Method of Reading

In classical rhetorical tradition, the concept of propriety had been theorized to hold a place equal to clarity as the two principle criteria for all good language use. The Sophists offered propriety as a crucial element in their considerations of rhetoric. The itinerant nature of their profession shaped the Sophists’ understanding of rhetorical propriety as “culturally relative,” so that they came to consider the occasions—the time, place, and circumstances—of their discourses as key determiners of their discourses’ focus, development, arrangement, and style. When the itinerant Sophists met the Socratic philosophers, many of whom were citizens of Athens, the Sophists’ sense of discursive occasion as a key determiner of rhetorical choice was called into question. Socrates began offering in his dialectical method a kind of discourse designed to meet all occasions. For Socrates, logical demonstration addressed the criterion of clarity without needing to answer to the criterion of propriety, which, in effect, questioned the status of rhetoric as an art by questioning the usefulness of propriety as an epistemological criterion for good language use.

Socrates suggests in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, for instance, that if it were properly theorized, rhetoric could be elevated to an art, but he does not seem interested in exploring it at any great length in the dialogue. Instead, he implies that a legitimate art of rhetoric assumes an orator not only well practiced in rhetoric’s stratagems and techniques, but also experienced with how and when to apply them. Socrates says that
One can become a “finished performer” (269d) by studying “mere empirical routine” (270b), but “the art itself, as distinct from the artist” (269d) requires what Pericles had: not only practice in speaking, but “high flown speculation” (270a). From his knowledge of human nature, Pericles “applied to the art of rhetoric what was suitable thereto” (270a). (McKenna 35)

Socrates bases his definition of the art of rhetoric directly on the concept of propriety, claiming that an orator can become a “finished performer” by studying the techniques of the art, but that more is required if the orator is really to practice an art of rhetoric. An art of rhetoric, says Socrates, requires “high flown speculation” on the different kinds and states of the human soul, for these are the materials of the orator’s art. He works upon human souls much like other artists shape the materials of their art, such as the sculptor’s cutting a shapeless block of marble to fit the contours of his mental image or the physician’s prescribing medication to bring the human body into closer accord with his image of health. For technical practice to reach the status of an art, concludes Socrates, the practitioner must discover and maintain a clear mental picture of what is “suitable” to the art.

A Socratic definition of an art requires that the artist have a clear understanding of propriety, by which the artist reflects on the materials and techniques suitable to his art. For rhetoric to be considered an art, then, Socrates argues that an orator must clarify his sense of propriety and adapt his speech to the different emotional states he might encounter in his hearers’ souls:

[The types of soul, Socrates concludes,] are of a determinate number, and their variety results in a variety of individuals. To the types of soul thus discriminated, there corresponds a determinate number of types of discourse. Hence a certain
type of hearer will be easy to persuade by a certain type of speech to take such and such action for such and such reason, while another type will be hard to persuade. (271d)

Socrates states explicitly that “by high flown speculation” the orator can begin outlining the types of soul he might encounter in his audience and determine which types of discourse he might fit to this audience in order to persuade them. Socrates concludes, in other words, that an art of rhetoric begins with a dialectical inquiry into the different states of the human soul and the discursive styles which might be suited to them, which suggests that an art of rhetoric is indeed possible. However, Plato has neither Socrates nor Phaedrus turn in their dialogue to analyze the practical character of the speaker and his speech, nor when and how the speaker adapts his character or speech to the passions of his audience. Plato has Socrates break off his speculation on the art perhaps for two reasons: either that such speculation would undermine conclusions he has drawn about rhetoric in his other dialogues, like the Gorgias, or because he sees the aporia into which his speculation on an ideal sense of propriety is taking him. McKenna also notes that “Plato’s idealistic theory of propriety . . . remains at the level of a fairly undeveloped assertion: one should address ‘a variegated soul in a variegated style,’ a ‘simple soul in a simple style’ (277c). At the same time,” McKenna continues, “this [sense of] propriety is fairly rigid in nature: it assumes a close, one-to-one fit between speech and audience” (36). The question remains about how a speaker suits his speech to a diverse audience, a question which Aristotle takes as his exigency for writing his Rhetoric.227

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227 In his work on to prepon in early Hellenic thought, Max Pohlenz notes Gorgias’ influence on Isocrates, who later argued for the creative aspects of rhetoric, which, unlike arts with “hard and fast rules,” requires “fitness for the occasion [kaiρὸν]” and “propriety of style [prepontōs]” (54). McKenna points out that Isocrates was not a theorist like Plato or Aristotle, so that he does not develop his assertion beyond the claim that rhetorical principles consistent with kairos or to prepon “can be learned through much study, so long as the student has a ‘vigorous and imaginative mind’” (Against the Sophists 17; qtd. in McKenna 159).
Although Socrates questioned the Sophists’ understanding of rhetoric as “culturally relative,” he did indeed posit a rhetorical ideal based directly on the concept of rhetorical propriety, which Aristotle later attempts to outline in realist terms. In the Rhetoric, Aristotle answers Plato’s call for a dialectical inquiry into the various characters and passions of the human soul, theorizing about the practical character of the speaker and his speech and which discourse styles best fit the variegated passions of his hearers. In the opening sentence of the Rhetoric, Aristotle brings back together language arts Socrates and Plato sought to divorce from one another. For Aristotle, “dialectic” and “rhetoric” are counterpart arts, and he bases this pairing on the premise that rhetoric employs a particular kind of syllogistic reasoning—the enthymeme—that meets the contingencies of rhetorical situation. Aristotle thus returns to the sophistic understanding of discourse as determined, at least in part, by the discourse’s occasion, its time, McKenna likewise states that “[s]cattered throughout the Platonic oeuvre are passages that seem to admit the legitimacy of propriety as a rhetorical norm—or at least as a valid human experience—but never is that recognition put into the mouth of Socrates” (33). McKenna does not speculate on reasons why this might be the case; instead, he cites Pohlenz’s proposition that even though “[to prepon] is connected with individual appearance, [it] has no place in Plato’s transcendental idealism” (55; qtd. in McKenna 33). Pohlenz examines the etymology of the word to prepon, tracing it first to the early uses of the verb prepein, which meant “the falling of the eyes on some external appearance,” and then to later uses of the verb prepein, which came to mean “the characteristic outline of one’s visible features,” and finally to the later, socially normative development of the verb prepein into the word to prepon, which referred to “the sense of ‘fitness’ between [sic] a person’s appearance, manner, and habits” (53; ctd. in McKenna 158).

It is interesting to note that the fading of rhetoric and the rise of the modern social sciences also marks the rise of the “symptom” in the writings of Marx, Darwin, and Freud. Each writer develops a “grand narrative” around reading the symptom. The “symptom” comes from the Greek symptomata, meaning syn “common” and píptein “to fall like a feather,” a “happening” or “attribute.” Also noteworthy is McKenna’s claim in Adam Smith: The Rhetoric of Propriety that Adam Smith, who was thoroughly read in classical philosophy and rhetoric, based his understanding of rhetorical propriety on the speaker’s establishing “common ground,” “fellow feeling,” or “sympathy” with his hearers: Gr. sympatheia, meaning syn “common” and pathos “feeling” or “emotion.” It is no surprise, then, that Aristotle answers Plato’s call for a dialectical analysis of rhetorical propriety by examining the materials of the art of rhetoric—the different emotional states or variegated souls of the hearers.

It is highly suggestive to compare prepein, which originally meant “the falling of the eyes on some external appearance,” to píptein “to fall like a feather.” None to my knowledge has theorized the etymological connection between prepein and píptein, specifically píptein’s development into words like “symptom”—meaning “common aspects”—words that theorists working after the decline of rhetoric in the 19th century, in the relatively new knowledge domains of psychology, sociology, and political economy used to map the “common aspects” of the human mind, society, and economy in and through language.
place, circumstances and audience. However, in an effort to distance himself from a sophistic notion of rhetorical propriety as “culturally relative,” Aristotle offers instead an outline of those contingencies that most directly affect an orator’s discursive choices. In Book 1 of the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle analyzes the contingencies of speaking situation, which he terms “artistic proofs,” imaging an art of rhetoric from the outset of his treatise. Although Aristotle triangulates speaking situation into ethical, logical, and emotional proofs, he appears to be most interested in the effects of speech, which is the rational material of the art of rhetoric. Aristotle even makes the character of the speaker an effect of the speech, arguing that the hearers’ view of and sympathy with the speaker arises not just from the speaker’s reputation, but the character the speaker fashions and the hearers receive in the speech. In Books II and III, respectively, Aristotle addresses more directly Plato’s call for a dialectical analysis of the variegated states of the human soul and the discourse styles suited to shaping them toward the purpose the speaker has in mind.

Aristotle offers the closest approximation of a realist art of rhetoric, and it is interesting to note that he is the first rhetorician to theorize propriety alongside clarity as the two chief excellences of language use. Aristotle defined the art of rhetoric as “an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion” (1355a1). A speech is only as persuasive as it is clear and only clear as it is appropriate to the composition of the audience: the hearers’ ages, professions, knowledge, wants, values, needs, etc. Aristotle realized that an art of rhetoric must be directly contingent upon the concept of propriety, which changes along with the ever-shifting composition and circumstances of a speaker’s speaking situation. And yet, Aristotle also realized that there are elements of propriety that remain constant. Aristotle’s basing his definition of art of rhetoric on the speaker’s faculties of observation recalls Socrates’ suggestion that all artistic production relies on the artist’s ability to shape the materials of his art to suit his mental image. Rhetoric is no different in this regard. The orator must work upon the materials of
his art—all of which comprise his rhetorical situation—to realize his speaking purpose. Because the orator deals with rational rather than inanimate materials means that his sense of propriety must suit his hearers’ sense of propriety; that is to say, the speaker must give the appearance that things are as he represents them to his hearers. Otherwise, the speaker loses his hearers’ sympathy and good will. For Aristotle, then, establishing a sense of rhetorical propriety is based directly on the “visual quality” of speech—on the speaker and hearers’ respective faculties of observation, their ability to calibrate their own personal reflections to what appears to be others’ perceptions of reality. Aristotle’s art of rhetoric, which hinges on the concept of propriety, involves ethical considerations. Aristotle develops a rhetorical sense of ethics in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, in his concept of prudence. Prudence, for Aristotle, is “ratiocination or reflection about the best course of action appropriate to the achievement of a particular end” (Kahn 18). Strikingly similar to his definition of rhetoric, Aristotle’s definition of prudence includes at once the rationalization of what is best from an observation of what is fitting or appropriate. Aristotle thus positions rhetorical propriety—the calibration of personal reflection and external reality—at the core of his ethics, in his concept of prudence. Aristotle positions prudence in turn as the primary virtue necessary for the achievement of all the other virtues.

Aristotle helped reestablish rhetoric’s status as an art by taking a dialectical approach to analyzing its materials and its techniques for shaping them. Aristotle realized the central place that Socrates had claimed propriety holds in all artistic production and especially in an orator’s achieving a desired rhetorical effect. Aristotle was classical rhetoric’s theorist, but Cicero was its practitioner. Cicero returned to embrace the sophistic elements inherent in Aristotle’s reexamination of how the occasion—the time, place, circumstances, and audience—of a speech condition the speaker’s discourse. Rather than follow Aristotle’s empirical definition of the art, Cicero loosened style from its theoretical prescriptions, arguing in the *Orator*, for instance, that
“[i]t is difficult to describe the ‘form’ or ‘pattern’ of the ‘best’ . . . because different people have different notions of what is best” (36). Aristotle had predicated his definition of rhetoric (as “an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion”) upon the orator’s sense of prudence (or “ratioception or reflection about the best course of action appropriate to the achievement of a particular end”). Cicero questioned Aristotle’s attempt to norm rhetorical propriety, arguing that what people consider “best” is socially and culturally relative and what people consider “appropriate” depends on the situation. Again, in the Orator, Cicero writes of propriety that

In an oration, as in life, nothing is harder to determine than what is appropriate. The Greeks call it prepon; let us call it decorum . . . For the same style and the same thoughts must not be used in portraying every condition in life, or every rank, position or age, and in fact a similar distinction must be made in response to place, time, and audience. The universal rule, in oratory as in life, is to consider propriety. (70-71)

Cicero develops a “situational” rhetoric in which propriety becomes a universal rule or concept that the orator must observe, even though propriety per se resists definition. It is Cicero’s notion of propriety that comes to be passed down in classical rhetorical tradition to affect the role propriety plays in rhetoric of the medieval churchmen, the rhetoric of Renaissance humanism, and their dialectical synthesis in Christian humanist rhetoric. It has been the work of the preceding chapters to trace the development of this peculiar synthesis: a conflation of Cicero’s “situational” rhetoric, which comes to shape humanist rhetoric, and Socrates’ and Aristotle’s predilection for “norm” or “pattern,” which comes to shape Christian rhetoric. The preceding
chapters trace the tensions inherent in Christian-humanist rhetoric to these differing senses of rhetorical propriety, tensions which are still being debated in modern rhetorical theory.

Modern rhetoricians, such as Richard Lanham and Stanley Fish, continue to question and, by doing so, underestimate the value of propriety as a rhetorical concept. Lanham has argued, for instance, that rhetorical propriety is a “pious fraud,” a “social trick,” a concept without any “specifiable content” (46). For Lanham, the “stylistic criterion decorum [is] locate[d] . . . entirely in the beholder [of a speech or text] and not in the speech or text [itself]” (46). Lanham acknowledges the visual quality of propriety by locating the stylistic criterion of propriety with the “beholder” of a speech or text, but he remains unconvinced that propriety has any other value than being universally apparent in every rhetorical situation. Lanham returns to Cicero’s “situation” rhetoric whereby propriety, as a concept that determines stylistic choices, cannot be determined apart from components, conditions, and circumstances of the rhetorical situation. Stanley Fish agrees, reaching like Socrates in Plato’s Phaedrus an interesting logical impasse. Fish has argued in Doing What Comes Naturally, for example, that attempts to theorize rhetorical propriety position rhetoricians between “foundational” and “anti-foundational” views of rhetoric. On the one hand, says Fish, the foundational view renders relatively unproblematical those components of rhetorical situation that determine what is appropriate. Foundational rhetoricians posit a concept of rhetorical propriety that develops from rhetorical situation, but can be transferred to other situations. Fish questions the foundational view as ideologically suspect. The anti-foundational view, on the other hand, problematizes components of rhetorical situation. Anti-foundational rhetoricians examine issues of ethics, style, audience, timing, circumstances, culture, etc. as shapers of rhetorical propriety, so that rhetorical propriety cannot be examined independent of rhetorical situation. Fish questions the value of a “situated” sense of rhetorical
propriety, for if the concept is not transferable to other situations, then it is methodologically useless.

Through their questioning of rhetorical propriety, modern rhetoricians return to the classical debates over rhetoric’s status as an art. Lanham echoes Cicero’s conception of propriety as entirely dependent upon rhetorical situation. Questions about the purpose, ethics, style, and timing of discourse change from situation to situation, which renders propriety a universal concept without any “specifiable content.” Fish echoes the Sophistic-Socratic debate over rhetoric’s “transferability,” which also implies its “teachability.” Part of the Sophists’ “sophistry,” Socrates had observed, was that they simultaneously held the anti-foundational view that elements of style are culturally relative, or at the very least contingent upon the speaker’s social situation, and the view that they had something to teach students of rhetoric. Socrates noted that these views were incompatible: a “situated” rhetoric is not transferable to other situations and, as such, not teachable. Students of sophistic rhetoric can imitate patterns of thought and style, but cannot identify clear norms or rules wholly applicable to new situations. Modern rhetoricians revisit these classical issues of rhetoric’s “situatedness” to warrant their dismissal of rhetorical propriety as a usable methodology. For rhetoricians like Lanham and Fish, propriety offers rhetoric the universal criterion of “appropriateness,” of which rhetoricians ought to be aware, but only inasmuch as they are also aware that the concept changes according to social situation. However, these rhetoricians leave largely unresolved tensions between what is “universal” and what is “particular” in their conceptions of rhetorical propriety. Focusing on debates in classical rhetoric, they overlook how Christian rhetoric has dealt with the question of propriety.

As the preceding chapters demonstrate, Christian rhetoric seeks to resolve the tensions between the universal and the particular. Chapter 1 examines Augustine’s post-conversionary
search for a Christian rhetoric that would rival the aesthetic beauty he found in classical style. Augustine’s early aesthetic theory attempted to account for “universal particulars” in a classical sense, for he found in the natural, material world expressions of symmetry and proportion that offered him a sense of whole, even as he noted that these wholes were composed of “fittingly arranged” parts. After his conversion to Christianity, Augustine found symmetry and proportion to be expressions of the supremely good and rational mind of God and found that that which lacked unity or harmony to be an expression of vice and therefore evil. Augustine’s early aesthetic also reveals the development of his Christian rhetoric. Trained in the Ciceronian tradition, Augustine embraced a “situated” rhetoric in which questions of fittingness were contingent upon the speaker’s social situation. Before his conversion, Augustine admits in his *Confessions*, he was repulsed by the plain and universal rhetoric of the Scriptures. After his conversion, however, he discovered a subtler rhetoric at work in the Scriptures. His burgeoning faith allowed him to see the Scriptures as expressions of God’s supremely good and rational mind. In particular passages of Scripture, Augustine noted a style whose clarity or obscurity was in direct proportion to the reader or hearers’ faith. Darker passages would exclude faithless readers from knowledge of God, check proud readers from reaching easy conclusions, and inspire intelligent readers to reflection and a deepening of their faith. Augustine also made connections across the Scriptures, discovering a typological rhetoric in Old Testament prophesies and their fulfillment in the New Testament, in the life and ministry of Christ. For Augustine, then, the Scriptures offered a “proportional” rhetoric that was beautiful because it was perfectly suited to

228 Augustine’s epistemology and method of Biblical exegesis both accord with Neoplatonic thought. For Augustine, knowledge is never imparted from one person to another. Rather, it is unlocked, awakened, or remembered. To render the Scriptures’ message intelligible, Augustine recommends that the reader pray for understanding, which presupposes that the reader humbly acknowledge his own ignorance and complete reliance God’s superabundant grace and wisdom. The reader’s proportion of faith thus unlocks or reawakens in him the same proportion of God’s grace and wisdom, whereby the believer may hear the Word of God, reason about the world, and read the Scriptures rightly.
the state of readers and hearers’ souls; readers and hearers could find in it precisely what they needed. Augustine found in the Scriptures a perfect rhetorical propriety: they were written for a universal audience, but they appeal to particular readers and listeners.

Christian writers writing in Augustine’s wake embraced Augustine’s development of a distinctly Christian rhetoric according to his sense of “prop(r)iety,” an interesting mixture of Christian piety and classical rhetorical propriety. Augustine’s Christian rhetoric offers the clearest articulation of the dialectical tensions between rhetorical propriety and the propriety of rhetoric, for he set out to baptize pagan rhetoric and logic for Christian ends. More specifically, Augustine Christianizes Cicero’s notion of the “complete orator,” who is gifted with the wisdom and eloquence required to achieve perfect rhetorical propriety. Although Cicero advocated a “situated” sense of rhetorical propriety, which suggests that it is not easily transferred between social situations, he achieved the ideal of a transferable sense of propriety in the person of the complete orator. As he writes in On Oratory, a “complete orator” must have a “complete oratory,” for which “[a] knowledge of a vast number of things is necessary” and for which “all the emotions of the mind, which nature has given to man, must be intimately known . . . To this must be added a certain portion of grace and wit, learning worthy of a well-bred man, and quickness and brevity in replying as well as attacking, accompanied with a refined decorum and urbanity” (10). For Augustine, Cicero’s “complete orator” had been realized in the historical ministry of Christ. Christ became the historical realization of the Scriptures’ “perfect” rhetoric in two respects: First, he was the typological fulfillment of Old Testament prophesies, as redeemer of Adam’s fall from grace. Second, his historical ministry developed a Christian ethics predicated upon an inversion of classical virtue, whereby “the first would be last” and “the meek would inherit the earth.” Augustine and the writers following him also imagined Christ according to the Scriptures’ rhetoric, in which Christ becomes the Word’s incarnation. Just as the Scriptures were
written for all of humanity, but more specifically addressed to meet the spiritual condition of individual readers and hearers, so did Christ sacrifice himself to save all of humanity from the stain of original sin and spiritual death, but this saving grace is contingent upon the proportion of individual Christians’ faith. In short, Augustine’s model of Christian rhetoric and the sense of prop(r)iety (i.e. piety and propriety) at its heart is Christ himself.

Christians writing after Augustine inherited the dialectical tensions with which Augustine had grappled in his Christianization of classical rhetorical principles. The Protestant Reformation especially reacquainted Christian writers with Augustine’s Christian rhetoric, for Protestants sought to recover the early church by turning to the early church fathers; they also recovered the classical rhetoric in the humanist educational program in which they were trained. In both cases they embraced the principle of *ad fontes*—that is, returning to the “source.” As a motivating factor of Christian-humanism, then, *ad fontes* meant returning to the foundation of the Christian church to recover its early liturgical practices and form of church governance; learning ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek that the Scriptures might be read in and retranslated from the languages in which they were written; and recovering the classical liberal arts that the whole man might be education in the humanist tradition. Though Christianity and humanism squared with the principle of *ad fontes*, however, their conflation in Protestant Christian-humanism was not without its tensions. Because Augustine had spent a lifetime reflecting upon these tensions between Christian and classical worldviews, his writings appealed to Protestant readers raised within the Christian-humanist tradition; it is no surprise, then, that Protestant writers echo Augustine when they treat the propriety of classical language arts in their practice of Christian piety.
The preceding chapters trace the influence Augustine’s Christian rhetoric had upon
Protestants’ developing sense of rhetorical propriety in their language practices: sermon writing, 
Bible translation, and religious poetry. Chapter 3 examines William Perkins’ sermon manual *The 
Art of Prophesying* to show that Perkins followed the basic organization of Augustine’s sermon 
manual *On Christian Doctrine*. Perkins divides his sermon manual into two main parts, upon 
which, Augustine had claimed in *On Christian Doctrine*, “all interpretation of Scripture depends: 
the process of discovering what we need to learn, and the process of presenting what we have 
learnt” (101). Augustine clearly organizes his sermon manual under two classical rhetorical 
heads: the *invention* of an argument, or “the process of discovering” what to say; and the 
*disposition* of an argument, or “the process of presenting” what is said. For Augustine, issues of 
style would be addressed under the latter head of presentation. Augustine thus spends the first 
three books of *On Christian Doctrine* detailing his exegetical method, for which he recommends 
study in the classical language arts of grammar, rhetoric, and logic. Perkins follows Augustine’s 
heavy emphasis on exegetical method, devoting a significant portion of the text to principles for 
interpreting and expounding Scripture, but rids his own manual of overt references to classical 
rhetoric. Instead, Perkins offers Ramist method for rightly “handling” and presenting the 
Scriptures’ rhetoric. Ramist dialectic offered Perkins a universal method for inventing and 
disposing his argument by a fairly simple process of division that not only yielded comprehensive 
and complex treatments of his subject, but also relegated to the exclusive province of rhetoric the 
Ciceronian concern with style that appeared at moments in Augustine’s treatment of preaching. 
Even though Perkins can be seen to embrace Cicero’s three oratorical offices in his exposition of 
the preacher’s duties, he distances himself from the radically situated and sophistic sense of 
propriety that came to characterize Ciceronian rhetoric. Such rhetoric places the contingencies of 
time and place above the preacher’s presentation of Christian propriety to his congregation: his
fidelity to the Scriptures’ rhetoric, not his own; and his expression of piety to God in and through Christ. Perkins clarifies in The Art of Prophesying Augustine’s argument in On Christian Doctrine that while he preaches, the minister’s words are merely instruments of God’s Word and that in his profession of faith, he ought to take Christ as his model.

Chapter 4 continues to trace the development of Augustine’s Christian rhetoric in the two most popular Protestant translations of the Scriptures: the Geneva translation and the Authorized Version. The translators of the Geneva translation and the Authorized Version were Protestant divines trained in the ancient languages and in the ministry, and so they understood their translation projects as opening the Word of God to their Christian brethren in much the same fashion as preaching the Scriptures to their congregations. That they realized the art of translation as a kind of preaching is apparent in the KJV translators’ preface “The Translators to the Reader,” in which they liken their project to “written preaching” (422). Without a unified theory of translation to guide their practice, both the Geneva translators and KJV translators turned first to the church fathers’ writings on translation. They read Jerome on translation, but preferred Augustine on translation. They found, however, that both Jerome and Augustine utilized classical models of translation in their translation of the Scriptures, but took less license in their translation than was recommended by classical writers, such Horace and Cicero. The work of the translator is always a balancing act between fidelity to the word or phrasing in the source language and capturing its spirit or sense in the target language. This problem is only compounded when the translator attempts to translate a sacred text. While both Jerome and Augustine struggled with their love of “Ciceronian” style, at first highly resistant to the strained literalism their translation of the Scriptures seemed to require, they did indeed practice balance fidelity to the Word of God and the Word’s Spirit in their translations. The Geneva and KJV translators inherited this struggle with the “propriety” of translation.
Both companies of translators write what amount to apologies for their translation projects in the prefaces to their texts; however, they depart slightly from one another about what actually constitutes their sense of propriety, inasmuch as these texts develop from different historical situations. The political and rhetorical situation in which the Geneva translators produced the Geneva Bible was one of exile. They wrote back to brethren in England, urging them to seize the opportunity of Elizabeth’s ascension to the throne to establish an Anglican Church more closely resembling the early Christian Church. The translators’ perception that a lingering Catholicism might continue to corrupt Anglican Church governance and liturgical practice moved them to translate with a clearly Calvinist purpose and limit readers’ interpretive freedom in the marginalia they included alongside their translation. The political and rhetorical situation in which the KJV translators produced the Authorized Version, on the other hand, was one of uneasy acceptance. For the most radical Protestants, Elizabeth’s political compromises had allowed the Catholic corruptions in Anglican Church governance and liturgical practice to continue. Elizabeth’s death and James’ ascension to the throne presented yet another opportunity to make the long-awaited reformations, especially given James’ background in Scottish Presbyterianism. James proved a disappointment, however, for he had a keen distaste for anything remotely resembling Presbyterianism and saw the “leveling” of church governance as a threat to his own governance. His famous argument for continuing the episcopacy of the Anglican Church “No bishop, no king!” motivated his careful selection of those divines who would comprise the companies of translators producing the Authorized Version. By James’ design, then, the translators were grouped and given rules to guide their translation in order to preserve the political status quo. For this reason, the KJV appears more “Anglican” in its intent and contains much less marginalia than the Geneva translation. It was produced to be read in all the churches of England, so its style suggests an oratorical performance. It makes more interpretive demands
of readers and hearers largely because it is missing the interpretive apparatus contained in Geneva’s marginal notes. The suggestion is that readers and hearers would appeal to the preacher to correct their interpretation, and these preachers might then be held accountable for their congregants’ departures from orthodox teachings.

The influence that sermon rhetoric had on Puritan poetics cannot be underestimated, and Chapters 5 and 6 explore this influence on the two most prolific Puritan writers in England and the American Colonies: John Milton and Edward Taylor. Several commentators have noted that Milton trained for the ministry before leaving this profession for a life of politics and poetry. Among these commentators, Jameela Lares has traced the development of Milton’s prose style and poetics to contemporary sermon manuals. In her focus on Milton’s preaching rhetoric, Lares brings together Milton’s political life as a writer of prose polemic and his private life as a writer of religious poetry. Milton’s epics offer a typological reading of Scripture: *Paradise Lost* dramatizing the failure of Christian rhetoric and *Paradise Regained* dramatizing its realization in the life, temptation, and ministry of Christ. By emphasizing Milton’s Christian rhetoric, however, Lares misses his classical influence. Others commentators, such as Donald Lemen Clark in *John Milton at St. Paul’s School: A Study of Ancient Rhetoric in English Renaissance Education* and William Pallister in *Between Worlds: The Rhetorical Universe of Paradise Lost*, have perhaps overemphasized the classical influences of Milton’s rhetoric. Chapter 5 examines the Christian-humanist tensions at the heart of Milton’s developing poetics.

Milton takes a Ramist approach to poetic invention and disposition, which is evidenced most clearly in his prose tracts: In *On Christian Doctrine*, for example, which he wrote and published alongside *Paradise Lost*, Milton divides and develops his understanding of Christian teachings according to Ramist logic. Likewise, in *Of Education*, Milton recalls the Ramist
purpose of education as a process of recovery that humanity might “repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love Him, to be like Him, as we may the nearest by possessing our soul of true virtue” (631). Milton’s expressed goal of the educational reforms he outlines in Of Education is recovery by returning—to “repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright.” The principle guiding his own education is the principle of ad fontes—again, a principle that is both Christian and humanist in its orientation. Milton learned Hebrew and Aramaic that he might read the Scriptures in their original languages, and he read widely in the classics in their original Greek and Latin. Milton’s humanism is also apparent in his arrangement of the classical language arts. Students, says Milton, must wade through the shallows of English, Latin, and Greek grammar and cultivate their prose style before they are ready to swim the depths of logic. Milton reveals his Ramist influence when he argues that logic ought to precede rhetoric and rhetoric ought to precede poetics much like Aristotle had argued when he likened logic to a “contracted palm” and rhetoric to an “open hand.” Aristotle’s analogy suggesting that one has to grasp an idea completely before presenting it adequately to others.

Milton’s develops his clearest expression of the classical and Christian tensions at the core of his thinking in his concept of “right reason.” Recalling his educational reforms as a search to “repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright,” Milton’s concept of right reason offers a mix of faith and reason: reason as an expression of faith or the proportion of one’s reasoning capacity serving to evidence his degree of faith. (Augustine’s finding in proportional logic an expression of the supremely good and rational mind of God comes to mind here.) Milton’s bases his understanding of Christian ethics (i.e. Christian piety and classical propriety) on the logic and rhetoric of the Scriptures. He dramatizes in Paradise Lost the failure of Adam to “know God aright,” and he dramatizes in Paradise Regained Christ’s modeling of a
reasonable faith or a faithful form of reasoning. In the concept of right reason, then, Milton illustrates logical and rhetorical propriety as the substance of Christian ethics, as both right and righteous speech and action. In both *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, Milton demonstrates that the logic and rhetoric of the Scriptures upon which he bases his notion of right reason requires the Christian to practice a faithful form of reason. For Milton, faith means patiently and obediently awaiting God’s revelation of divine providence. Adam and Eve lose paradise when their desire to move beyond their proper sphere of life and activity exceeds their obedience to God’s plan. They lose paradise, in other words, when their desire moves them to question their faith and act upon their desires impatiently and impetuously. Christ regains paradise within for humanity when he patiently endures Satan’s temptation and remains faithful and obedient to God despite his role in the divine plan being concealed from him. Christ demonstrates a keen sense of kairotic propriety that differs from the classical, rhetorically situated sense of propriety that characterized sophistic discourse. Christ meets each temptation as a new occasion, for Satan takes different shapes and his temptations take different shapes; however, Christ’s sense of propriety remains the same. He recognizes Satan for who he is when Satan’s words question the Word of God in the Scriptures or urge Christ to realize his place as the Son of God before the time God had appointed. Christ’s patient, faithful, and obedient appeal is that this time is known to God alone and that it is proper to “stand and wait” for God’s revelation. Although the occasion—the time, place, and circumstances—that comprise the rhetorical situation change slightly, Christ’s sense of propriety remains the same.

The typological rhetoric that informs Milton’s sense of propriety in his epics also informs Edward Taylor’s sense of propriety in his *Preparatory Meditations*. Chapter 6 examines Taylor’s

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229 Milton references “standing and waiting” in the final line of his well known poetic reflection upon the Christian’s spiritual condition, “When I Consider How My Light Is Spent.”
poetics, which, Charles Mignon has convincingly argued, is predicated on a “decorum of imperfection.” Taylor understood his call to the ministry as a lifelong pursuit of perfecting the materials of vocation and working toward a perfect sense of rhetorical propriety. Taylor’s career as a preacher-poet illustrates the paradox of the Calvinist artist, who would praise God rightly, but knows that his praise is inadequate to the task. Mignon’s work examines Taylor’s sense of stylistic propriety at some length, but Mignon overlooks Taylor’s sense of rhetorical propriety. Taylor imagined his meditative poetry as preparation for his communion sermons, so that, for Taylor, the writing process was not merely a process of poetical invention, but rather a process of clarification. He clarified in the language of poetry the doctrines he would preach in the language of rhetoric. Meditation, which Taylor envisioned as a kind of “pre-communion,” is designed to achieve epistemological clarity in and through the Word of God. This is not to say, however, that Taylor was not also interested in aesthetic delight, for his poetry registers a great deal of word play. Taylor delights in the complexity of typological rhetoric, and the complex intertextual patterns that Taylor achieves within and across his Preparatory Meditations reveals that he writes within and across the Scriptures themselves, embodying them in his poetry much like he would embody Christ as the living Word of God in the ritual of communion. Meditative communion thus offered Taylor aesthetical delight, invigorating his approach to real communion in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.

Taylor embraced the vocation of the “Christian orator” as a lifelong pursuit, a process of perfecting his understanding of the language arts in and through Scripture. Like Milton’s Christ, who is Milton’s perfect orator, Taylor desires perfect communion with Christ’s Word-body; he desires the kind of epistemological clarity and aesthetical delight only achieved in the hereafter. Taylor bases his poetics directly on sermon rhetoric and the typological patterns he discovers within the confines of Scripture and the rite of communion. His typological and self-referential
word play renders his sense of the Scriptures and poetry he writes upon them a closed referential system; nevertheless, Taylor discovers in his pairings of the Word with Christ’s body in the communion ritual that Scripture not only offers infinite poetical material, but also models a perfect rhetorical propriety that he can only desire to delineate in his poetry. Taylor’s Word-word play in his poetry recalls Augustine’s similar use of the metaphor to explain his understanding of Christian piety in the through the Scriptures. Taylor’s wordplay also suggests that he makes Derridean moves in his poetry—that there is no “outside text” to the Scriptural Word, even though this closed referential system can produce the infinite poetical and rhetorical word-work that describes the materials of Taylor’s vocations as preacher and poet. Desire for perfect communion is Taylor’s poetical and rhetorical motive: perfect poetical communion with Christ’s imagined body in prayer and meditation as Taylor anticipates spiritual communion with Christ in the hereafter, and perfect rhetorical communion with his congregation—or Christ’s metaphorical body in the Christian Church—as Taylor delivers his sermon on the Lord’s Supper. Both poem and sermon have epistemological and aesthetical tensions of which Taylor is acutely aware as he tries to trace the outline of Christ-as-Word in both poem and sermon.

Rhetorical Propriety as a Usable Methodology

In the preceding chapters, I argue for a method of analysis that is dialectical in its movement. As the title of this section indicates, such analysis begins with “rhetorical propriety.” Actually, “rhetorical” propriety is the second of three analytical moments that make up a full methodology. The first moment is “stylistic propriety.” The third and final moment is “economic propriety.” Each of these analytical moments is internally related to the others within the term
“propriety” at the moment of the text, at the moment of the text’s immediate social-rhetorical context, and finally, in the case of Christian rhetoric, within the moment of the larger historical-spiritual (i.e. Scriptural) context. The last of these moments—the larger historical-spiritual context—serves as one synchronic moment of a larger diachronic movement Williams explains in his analytical categories of the dominant, residual, and emergent cultural formation. Basing my method on Williams’ concept of “cultural materialism,” which is in turn based on Voloshinov’s notion of the social “accent,” as living, organic, and ideological language material that congeals in social convention, the terms propriety and impropriety are not only useful analytical categories to examine the unfolding of Christian rhetoric and ethics as a historical process, but also useful analytical categories to examine culturally defining, or determining, moments of this process.

Simply defined, “propriety” means conduct or discourse befitting particular social situations or cultural practices, but even in this simple definition, specifically in the words “fitting conduct or discourse,” one notes both ethical and rhetorical considerations. In Adam Smith: The Rhetoric of Propriety, McKenna theorizes about the connection between politics, ethics, and aesthetics, all of which he subsumes under the concept of rhetorical propriety. He implies that there is a connection between rhetorical propriety and economic propriety, but in an effort to explain the moral and ethical imperative of Adam Smith’s rhetorical theory and the role rhetorical propriety plays in Smith’s sociological system, McKenna leaves largely unexplored how material relations inform social relations. The “workable methodology” that McKenna foresees in the first chapter of his book suggests a dialectical movement in the Marxist sense, but he does not develop his understanding of propriety in this direction. He overlooks the dialectical movement implied in the subject-object relations of the Greek word to prepon, as “that which appears before the eyes conspicuously,” and so he does not trace stylistic and ethical propriety—and the sense of “ownership” the word propriety suggests—to cultural production in a real, materialist sense.
Put another way, ethical propriety, rhetorical propriety, and aesthetic (or stylistic) propriety are not just social *observances*, they are also socially *observed*. They are ideological and, as such, fraught with social tension. McKenna dismisses the Marxist propriety-as-ideology connection because he adopts a limited, first-generation Marxist view of ideology. Second-generation Marxists revised their understanding of ideology from the different pejorative senses, such as “illusion, false consciousness, unreality, upside-down reality” (Williams, *Keywords* 156), which seem to pervade much of Marx’s, Engle’s, and first-generation Marxists’ writings on the subject, to adopt instead an apparently more neutral sense of ideology, which can be seen in the most important of Marx’s critiques of political economy. In a notable passage from *Contribution to the Critique of Political Philosophy* (1859), for example, Marx writes that

> The distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production . . . and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic—in short, ideological—forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. (qtd. in Williams, *Keywords* 156)

In this more neutral sense of the word that Williams claims Marx uses just as widely in his writings as the sense of ideology as “illusion,” ideology is understood as “the set of ideas which arise from a given set of material interests or, more broadly, from a definite class or group” (156). This sense of ideology presupposes group interests, which renders the word modificable by groups whose material interests are represented in ideological forms, as in “proletarian ideology” or “bourgeois ideology.” In its neutral sense, the word “ideology” positions the analyst to search for the adjective that modifies the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophical forms in which material conditions of production get expressed. Here “propriety” does not replace “ideology” as simply a word to analyze the social mediation of material relations, though unlike “ideology,” a case does not have to be made for the word’s neutrality. Rather, propriety offers a fluid
methodology to analyze and transition—dialectically—among the different moments and relations that make up the ideological form. Propriety allows us to chart changes in the ideological form from rhetorical moment to historical moment and to analyze how different ideological forms overlap, intersect, or otherwise relate with one another. To treat merely one ideological form like ethics, for instance, also implicates rhetoric, politics, religion, and aesthetics. The challenge of dialectical method is in its presentation, in rendering cohesive an analysis that is culturally and historically complex. The concept of propriety provides analytical cohesion among the different analytical moments, and so dialectical method offers organizational coherence.

I therefore offer rhetorical propriety as a methodology to analyze cultural artifacts, a methodology that contains three categorically and ideologically distinct moments, each one linked to the other two as slightly different inflections on the word “propriety.” The first moment of analysis I call “stylistic propriety,” which extends from the technical elements that compose the cultural artifact, to the stylistic idiosyncrasies that characterize the composer, and again to the aesthetic response the artifact is designed to elicit in its consumer. In terms of the literary artifact, for instance, “stylistic propriety” considers the constraining and creative aspects of genre, the stylistic construction of artistic ethos, the politicization of the aesthetic response and the aestheticization of political speech, writing, and images.

All of these “stylistic” considerations beg analysis at the other two moments, the second of which is “rhetorical propriety.” Rhetorical propriety extends from the cultural artifact itself to its immediate social situation, which comprises the institutional discourses—legal, political, religious, educational, familial—that give rise to, but are very often at odds with one another in the cultural artifact. At this moment of the literary artifact’s analysis, the analyst treats, for example, the social psychology of the author/speaker and reader/audience as not merely
constitutive of literary style, artistic ethos, and aesthetic response, but also constituted by their social situation and historical moment.

Rhetorical propriety implies stylistic propriety and vice versa, so that the first and second moments can be said to inform one another. Both of these moments in turn inform and are informed by the final moment, “economic propriety.” Marxist dialectic assumes material or economic determiners “in the final analysis,” and because this method is dialectical, its third moment extends from the cultural artifact’s immediate social situation and historical moment to the social and economic materials that give the cultural artifact its momentary shape or form. In terms of the literary artifact, then, “economic propriety” extends from the linguistic materials that inform it, to the economic situation that provides the space of its performance, to the social, linguistic, or literary conventions that promote conformity or position the author to challenge these conventions.

This is precisely the moment at which social groups as discourse communities come into focus and, more specifically, how political economy and power relations ultimately serve to shape language use—whether that means stabilizing, destabilizing, or re-stabilizing it. Moreover, propriety in its socio-economic senses implies both stylistic and rhetorical propriety because the grammatical and rhetorical “fittingness” of particular language uses gets determined by its always-tense relation to the practices of a language community as a whole. For the social analyst, language serves as the “linchpin” linking individual consciousness, which is social consciousness in any case, to the real, lived experiences which give rise to it and to which it in turn gives shape and meaning. The tensions of the third and final analytical moment render propriety all the more important as an analytical starting point, for propriety not only means stylistic “fittingness” or social “appropriateness,” but also “ownership”—as in word “proprietor.” In the final analysis, then, one must account for the construction not only of individual identity, but also for authorship
and authority as socially “contingent” or “mediated,” and both identity and authorship as a kind of “ownership”—that is to say, the self’s recognition of or separation from the larger currents of cultural and literary production. This recognition or rejection I understand as the “style” of an author, which is the material register of his/her accumulation of cultural capital in and through linguistic practice (literature merely serving as a particular form of cultural production). Whether viewed from the angle of “fittingness” or “ownership,” stylistic propriety is both historical and material, and this entire analytical movement is dialectical, at least as I have discussed it here, albeit in the most provisional terms.

The preceding chapters have traced the evolution of Christian rhetoric and ethics, starting with Augustine’s development of the “Christian orator” from a tense conflation of classical and Christian sources. Christian writers after Augustine embraced, but refined Augustine’s sense of Christian ethics in various ways, their subtle differences being largely contingent upon their social situation and rhetorical purpose. Informing both Augustine and later Protestant writers’ conceptions of Christian ethics, however, is a clear sense of propriety that can be traced to Scripture rhetoric, which came to shape these writers’ own rhetoric in striking ways. Propriety in the Marxist sense means situating any conclusion about social life, including religious life, in economic life, which is determined “in the final analysis” by material relations of production. For the Christian writers discussed in the preceding chapters, “social and material life” is never independent of “religious life,” for they realized their social and material existence in a spiritual economy, defining their social and material vocations by their spiritual vocations in divine providence. They understood words, which were the materials of their vocations, ever in relation to the Word of God. Indeed, they thought and wrote upon the Scriptures, imagining at their most

230 In Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, for instance, Frederic Jameson claims the aesthetic of postmodernism can be defined as a rejection of every form of high modernism. Authors come to define their style by a recognition or rejection of other authors.
reflective moments that their discursive exchanges were spiritual exchanges. They defined their authority by the style and rhetoric of the Scriptures, concluding that a life properly lived was a life that “owned” the debt to God in the Scriptures and through the Scriptures in the life and ministry of Christ. For these writers, “Christian rhetoric” meant coming to terms with a sense of “prop(r)iety,” a sense of Christian piety and rhetorical propriety shaped by Scripture rhetoric.

Works Cited


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