FROM TIME TO TIME:
NARRATIVES OF TEMPORALITY IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND,
1610-1670

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Abstract

This dissertation traces the emergence of a new sense of time in seventeenth-century English literary culture. Focusing on poetry and prose by John Donne, Thomas Hobbes, Thomas Browne, and Andrew Marvell, I argue that this temporality emerged in direct opposition to the priorities of early modern historiography. What I call “the new time” belongs to two cultural trends that emerged at the turn of the seventeenth century: on one hand, the rise of skepticism, materialism, and the new science; on the other, a growing sense that the past no longer sufficed to justify England’s present or set a course for her future. Under these conditions, the literary concept of “time” grew more closely allied to the material world than to the grand abstractions of history. The literature of the new time accepts, even embraces, time’s ability to sever the ancient from the modern.

Renaissance historians, assuming that human nature remained constant over millennia, probed the past for words and actions that could generate what Niccolò Machiavelli termed “practical lessons” for the present. History was a science of both causality and priority, tracing effects back to their causes and distinguishing between useful and useless facts. Skeptics like Michel de Montaigne, however, proposed that “effects do but halfe refer their causes.” The narrators of the new time developed this skeptical temporality into a literature that [assumed] an insuperable rupture between past and present. In the same period, English writers began to treat time as a versatile and dynamic literary subject in its own right. Other factors helped to detach time from history, including the proliferation of personal timepieces like pocket watches; the rediscovery of classical materialism and its intersection with philosophical libertinism; and, beginning in the 1630s, the mysterious shadows over England’s political future. Through my readings of Donne’s *Anniversaries*, Hobbes’s *Leviathan* and *Behemoth*, Browne’s *Hydriotaphia, or Urne-Buriall*, and Marvell’s interregnum poetry, I delineate a literary temporality defined by its narrators’ anti-historical constructions of the present and the recent past.
Introduction: Time Against History

He seeing himselfe restord to light, and so manie amazed men stand about him, resolued their vnceertain perplexity in these terms. Why stand you stonisht at my vnusual deformities? when no liuing man conuerseth with the dead, but is thus disfigured.

—Thomas Nashe, *Pierce Penilesse His Supplication to the Diuell*

“And though haply some men may thinke that in discoursing of Time much Time may be spent (which though otherwise I acknowledge may be true,) yet hold I not the Time imployde in this Treatise, either lost or ill spent,” wrote Daniel Powel in 1608. Powel presents the “Treatise” in question, *The Redemption of Lost Time*, as the fruits of his “late Travels,” before which he “neither apprehended what Time is, nor vnderstood the power and value thereof” (A6r). Yet his preface displays another kind of apprehension: a fear that narrating the passage of time, discussing time as time, might itself constitute a waste of time. Lest his audience conclude that reading a book about time is similarly wasteful, Powel suggests that he is in fact saving us time by compressing his “long pursuit in a strange land” (A4v-A5r) into a “small Manual” (A8r) of 130 pages. Nor is the length of time we spend pursuing knowledge necessarily proportional to the quality of knowledge achieved, for “in one instance of time, one may gaine infinite eternitie of glorie” (6r). But despite Powel’s framing of his treatise as a kind of travel narrative, “a dish of rare dainties . . . a pretious Iewell richer then the gold of Ophir” (A5r), *The Redemption of Lost Time* is all but devoid of personal experience or original argument. Instead, Powel assembles a

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1 Thomas Nashe, *Pierce Penilesse his supplication to the diuell* (London: printed by Abell Ieffes for I. Busby, 1592), H4r.
2 Daniel Powel, *The redemption of lost time* (London: Nicholas Okes, 1608), A8r-v. This book’s prefatory materials lack page numbers, so I have cited them by folio signature, as I will do throughout this manuscript when page numbers are absent. The page numbers after the preface occur on the recto of each page, so that page 6, for instance, comprises both 6r and 6v. Portions of this introduction appear in my article “Ancient Matter, New-Fashioned Shapes: Time as Object in Shackerley Marmion’s *The Antiquary*,” forthcoming in *Renaissance Studies*. I also presented portions of this introduction at the “Time and Early Modern Thought” conference at the University of York in May 2014.
pastiche of biblical and classical sources, evoking one of the most popular time- and labor-saving devices of early modern Europe: the commonplace book. He even appends a list of “Authors (besides sacred Scriptures),” from Alphonsus de Castro to Zedrenus, whose reflections on time appear throughout the text. Powel could easily have written his treatise without traveling farther than his own bookshelf. Yet, for some reason, he felt the need to disguise his account of reading as an account of living.

This tension between ancient authority and worldly experience defines the literature of temporality that emerged from the intellectual and political upheavals of seventeenth-century England. In 1608, time was not yet necessarily a matter of subjectivity. Narratives of time belonged to the genre of history; writers like Powel felt reluctant to insert themselves into an account of the flow of time, or indeed to craft such an account at all. Yet as Powel’s preface reveals, the discourse of temporality had already begun to drift in a different direction. Before long, literary treatments of time not only diverged from historiography but, in some cases, actually worked to undermine it. What I call the “new time” belongs to two overlapping cultural trends: on one hand, the rise of empiricism, materialism, and the new science; on the other, a growing sense that the past no longer sufficed to justify England’s present or set a course for her future. ³ Under these conditions, the literary concept of “time” became more closely allied to the material world than to the grand abstractions of history. Narratives of temporality recorded what history let fall: the tangible, the subjective, the experiential. Seventeenth-century English writers grappled with a maddening paradox: how to narrate a concept that itself underlay every narrative, yet seemed by its very nature to work against the conventions of narrative? Time made literature possible, yet proved the most elusive of literary subjects.

³ I am grateful to Nigel Smith for suggesting the phrase “the new time.”
Despite the growing prominence of time studies in literary scholarship, comprehensive discussions of early modern temporalities remain relatively scarce. Numerous monographs survey the historical thought of the period, but as J. K. Barret notes in her recent study of futurity in Renaissance English literature, “[c]ritical studies have for too long understood ‘time’ to mean history and historical pattern.” The most prominent examination of time as distinct from history in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English literature is still Ricardo J. Quinones’s The Renaissance Discovery of Time, published in 1972. Focusing on Dante, Petrarch, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton, Quinones argues that “victory over time is the measure of their heroism; a need for special distinction, one which rises above the anonymity of the everyday, compels them to seek the arduous, the unusual.” My own reading of seventeenth-century English authors both canonical and obscure reveals a far less antagonistic relationship to time. For John Donne, Thomas Hobbes, Thomas Browne, and Andrew Marvell, time enabled a kind of anti-heroism, a subversion of the Renaissance historiographic model that privileged, in Donne’s words, “what Caesar did, yea, and what Cic’ro said.” Both Quinones and Barret focus on accounts of time to come: whereas Quinones argues that Renaissance thinkers attempted to control the future through “progeny and a preoccupation with fame,” Barret discerns in early modern literature a more expansive vision that “includes extraordinary variety, from modesty of ambition to a commitment to artistic experimentation, yet shares a sense of the uncertainty and

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boundlessness of artistic production.” Though my own project considers literary conceptions of the future, I am ultimately more concerned with seventeenth-century authors’ anti-historical constructions of the present and the recent past.

It is a scholarly commonplace that the so-called “battle of the books” in the 1690s produced “a draw in which the field was pretty much divided—the ancients commanding the humanities, and the moderns the sciences[.]” Time, however, was one section of the field that did not divide so neatly. Though I hesitate to assign the “moderns” label to pre-Enlightenment authors, some of whom viewed astronomy with as much skepticism as they did ancient history, it is fair to say that the texts considered in this study take a more or less “modern” view of time. I use the word “modern” carefully here: not to equate these writers’ sense of time with our own or to pass an approving qualitative judgment upon it, but to distinguish it from other early modern temporalities, ones that looked either backward to an idealized classical past or forward to the apocalypse. Barret argues convincingly that “without apocalypse and the end of time as an organizing paradigm, the future changed: it became open-ended.” But the past changed, too. “We cannot assure our selues of the chiefe cause,” argues Michel de Montaigne in “Of Coaches”: “we hudle vp a many together, to see whether by chance it shall be found in that number[.]” The literature of the new time illustrates a slackening of the ties between past and present, cause and effect. Historical causes in particular are not discovered but constructed: “It is

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8 Quinones, The Renaissance Discovery of Time, 25; Barret, Untold Futures, 7.
9 Joseph M. Levine, Between the Ancients and the Moderns: Baroque Culture in Restoration England (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), ix-x.
10 Barret, Untold Futures, 7.
easie to verifie, that excellent authors, writing of causes doe not only make vse of those which
they imagine true, but eftsoones of such as themselues beleue not[.]”

What I am calling (albeit reluctantly) the “modern” view of time is generally associated
with the Restoration and eighteenth century. Stuart Sherman renders an invaluable account of
literary temporality in England after 1660, arguing that improvements in chronometry in the
second half of the seventeenth century served to “limn a new temporality—of durations closely
calibrated, newly and increasingly synchronized, and systematically numbered—durations that
might serve as ‘blanks’ in which each person might inscribe a sequence of individual actions in
an individual style.” My own project attends to the half-century before that technological
turning point, when temporality was slightly wilder: when empiricism had only lately begun to
challenge the dominance of textual authority; when pocket watches were less an aid to
productivity than an object of curiosity and a source of social cachet; and when the intellectual
value of narrating the passage of time was not yet taken for granted. Despite these differences,
the lineaments of the “new temporality” that Sherman describes were already visible across
literary genres at the turn of the seventeenth century. Needless to say, the early modern period
was not the first to theorize time as a discrete concept or entity. Before the late sixteenth century,
however, few English writers took time seriously as a versatile and dynamic literary (as opposed
to philosophical) subject in its own right. The change resulted from several social and political
factors, of which the most significant is arguably what Peter Burke has termed “the invention of
leisure”: “a gradual rise of a sense of ‘free’ time among ordinary people” as well as elites across
early modern Europe. Other factors specific to England include the growing popularity of

12 Ibid.
13 Stuart Sherman, Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries, and English Diurnal Form, 1660-1785 (Chicago and London: The
antiquarianism; the proliferation of personal timepieces like pocket watches; the rediscovery of materialism and its intersection with philosophical libertinism; and, beginning in the 1630s, the mysterious shadows over England’s political future.

If developments before the Civil War frayed the intellectual and psychological threads between past and present, the execution of Charles I in 1649 seemed to many of his contemporaries to sever them completely. Lying like a scar over the heart of the century, the regicide lacked precedent in the annals of the national past: in other words, it lacked history, and so threatened the authority of history. David Norbrook notes that the concept of republicanism entered the English imagination well before the 1640s, as “Shakespeare and Jonson vividly realized past republican cultures for a popular audience.”

But Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists presented classical republicanism and its attendant regicides: not one playwright transplanted an alternative model of government to the present day. For most seventeenth-century English people, there seems to have been a psychological gulf between staging the assassination of Julius Caesar and formulating the thought that an English monarch should—or even could—suffer Caesar’s fate. In general, Charles’s survivors worked to widen, not bridge, that gap: even Oliver Cromwell’s Commonwealth government “distanced itself from the memory of the regicide.” Charles’s death intensified the phenomenon that, according to Andrew Escobedo, defined the temporal consciousness of early modern England: the “perception of historical loss, the sense that the past was incommensurate with and possibly lost to the

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present.” Whether writing before or after the regicide, Donne, Hobbes, Browne, and Marvell all take the existence of that rift as a precondition for their narratives of temporality.

To acknowledge the presence and effects of a historical rupture, however, is not necessarily to accept it as tragic. No optimist has ever posed more successfully as a pessimist than Hobbes, who predicates an entire theory of temporality on mental and material decay: “we lose (for example) of Cities wee have seen, many particular Streets; and of Actions, many particular Circumstances” (2:28). That cavalier parenthesis gestures to a world of loss. Yet, for Hobbes, a civilization cannot endure without an account of that loss: that is, an “account of time” (2:192). Ovid’s image of tempus edax rerum lingered well into the seventeenth century, but with a difference: writers on both sides of the English political divide increasingly saw the devourer of all things as a bearer of opportunity. Some even made light of it: “Time eateth all things could the Poets say, / The times are chang’d our times drink all away.” Contrast that irreverent epigram from 1640 with Arthur Golding’s grimmer rendition of Ovid from 1567: “Thou tyme the eater vp of things, and age of spyghtfull téene. / Destroy all thing. And when that long continuance hath them bit, / You leysurely by lingring death consume them euery whit.”

Whereas classical poets like Ovid lamented the effects of time, classical philosophers took a more dispassionate view, acknowledging the roles of both nature and human consciousness in the construction of temporality. In Timaeus, Plato locates time outside of

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19 George Herbert, Wits recreations. Selected from the finest fancies of moderne muses (London: printed for Humphrey Blunden, 1640), E4r. (This is not, it should be noted, the George Herbert of The Temple.)
consciousness, defining it as “a moving image of eternity” and the heavenly bodies as instruments that “came to be in order to set limits to and stand guard over the numbers of time.”  

Our awareness of the movement of the heavens has “led to the invention of number and has given us the idea of time and opened the path to inquiry into the nature of the universe. These pursuits have given us philosophy, a gift from the gods to the mortal race whose value neither has been nor ever will be surpassed.”  

(Hobbes expresses a similar sentiment in *Leviathan*, arguing that “Leasure is the mother of Philosophy”; for Hobbes, however, philosophy is far from an unambiguous good.) In book 4, part 11 of *Physics*, written about a decade later than *Timaeus*, Aristotle begins his inquiry into the nature of time not with the heavens but with an oddity of human perception: that “when we experience no changes of consciousness, or, if we do, we are not aware of them, no time seems to have passed . . . for under such circumstances we fit the former ‘now’ on to the later, making them one and the same and eliminating the interval between them, because we did not perceive it” (383). This leads Aristotle to conclude that time is not itself motion; rather, it is “the calculable measure or dimension of motion with respect to before-and-afterness” (387). By centering time in consciousness, Aristotle “eliminates Plato’s metaphysical point of view—the opposition between time and eternity—from his own account of time . . . What he seeks to do is to establish the connection of time with movement in general, not, as far as he can help it, with any particular movement or movements.”

Writing roughly three centuries later, Lucretius contends in Book 1 of *De rerum natura* that time exists only insofar as it makes an impression on the senses: “tempus item per se non

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22 Ibid., 35.
est, sed rebus ab ipsis / consequitur sensus, transactum quid sit in aevo, / tum quae res instet,
quid porro deinde sequatur. / nec per se quemquam tempus sentire fatendumst / semotum ab
rerum motu placidaque quiete” (I.459-463). (“Time also exists not of itself, but only from the
things is derived the sense of what has been done in the past, then what thing is present with us,
further what is to follow after. Nor may we admit that anyone has a sense of time by itself
separated from the movement of things and quiet calm.”)25 Because Lucretian time is an
“accident of motion,” argues Gisela Berns, “it is [also] an accident of nature, since nature
comprehends the whole scale of meaning[.]”26 Unsurprisingly, Lucretius’ account of time comes
closest to those of the seventeenth-century materialists, including Hobbes, and of the writers
influenced by materialism and atomism, such as Marvell.27

Though classical philosophers differ over whether time is external or internal to human
experience, they tend to agree that it is either defined by the movement of bodies or is itself a
kind of motion. For the writers of the new time, this principle becomes a conceit: if time is
identical to the motion of objects, then the motion of objects can reshape time. Ofer Gal and Raz
Chen-Morris propose that the new science, in its “thorough fusion of practical and theoretical,
rigorous and playful, ‘scientific’ and ‘artistic,’” was also a “Baroque science” that must not be
read as antithetical to “the distortion and sensuality of its contemporary art[.]”28 For similar
reasons, the new time of seventeenth-century English literature might usefully be described as
“Baroque time.” Not only is it closely connected to the material world; in some cases it is also

itself material, a plastic substance that can be expanded, contracted, and twisted into unlikely shapes. Christopher Johnson identifies the Baroque period with “contradictory feelings of novelty and belatedness, radical skepticism, and an excessive love of spectacle,” three attributes visible throughout the literature of the new time.\textsuperscript{29} The Baroque sensibility is ludic, finding pleasure in disproportion and impossibility, and it is no coincidence that few seventeenth-century authors constructed alternative temporalities without also edging into satire. The texts that form the centerpieces of the following chapters—Donne’s \textit{Anniversaries}, Hobbes’s \textit{Leviathan}, Browne’s \textit{Hydriotaphia, or Urne-Buriall}, and Marvell’s interregnum poetry—all bring a distinctly irreverent eye to the question of temporality, though they are not themselves satires in the strictest sense. Gérard Genette proposes that “the baroque manifests an acute awareness of ‘otherness’ and that the ‘other’ is actually a deformation of the ‘same.’”\textsuperscript{30} By definition, satire is also “a “deformation of the same,” an effort to shine a monstrous light on the mundane. Whereas Renaissance history starts from the assumption that time is forward-moving, external to the human mind, and either linear or cyclic, the new time is defined by its narrators’ refusal to take its nature, shape, direction, or pace for granted.

When I discuss the new time’s opposition to “history,” I refer to the literary form developed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by such humanist writers as Leonardo Bruni, Lorenzo Valla, and Niccolò Machiavelli. Though any attempt to enumerate the governing principles of such a capacious genre will necessarily elide some important nuances, I must take that liberty here. In general, humanist history assumes the consistency of human nature over time, despite changes in custom, religion, and social structure. This means that the words and


actions of great men, no matter how long dead, can generate what Machiavelli terms “practical lessons” for the present.\textsuperscript{31} For Burke, Machiavelli’s work exemplifies the Renaissance “rise of explanation”: the growing sense that events, no matter how surprising, could no longer be attributed to irresistible fortune.\textsuperscript{32} In the early Renaissance, “history was considered a species of rhetoric primarily valued for its ability to inflame auditors to virtue. . . . Over the sixteenth century, scholars reconfigured the study of the past, portraying the reading of histories as a form of experience that generated wisdom by revealing the processes of causation underlying earthly events.”\textsuperscript{33} By the late sixteenth century, Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton argue, historical study “was always goal-orientated—an active, rather than a passive pursuit.”\textsuperscript{34} For educated Elizabethans, “this ‘activity of reading’ characteristically envisaged some other outcome of reading beyond accumulation of information; and that envisaged outcome then shaped the relationship between reader and text.”\textsuperscript{35} Humanist history was a science not only of causality but also of priority, training its readers to distinguish between useful and useless information.

Thomas Blundeville’s 1574 treatise \textit{The true order and methode of wryting and reading hystories} exemplifies this science of prioritization as it existed in Elizabethan England.

“Hystories bee made of deede done by a publique vveale, or agaynst a publique vveale,” Blundeville argues, “and such deede, be eyther deede of vvarre, of peace, or else of sedition

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\item[34] Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, “‘Studied for Action’: How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy,” \textit{Past and Present} 129 (Nov. 1990), 30.
\item[35] Ibid., 31.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
and conspiracie” (A8v). By definition, then, a “history” is an account of actions on the public stage; a history of private life would be a contradiction in terms. Biographies must provide either positive or negative moral examples for the reader: “All those persons whose lyues haue beeene such as are to bee followed for their excellencie in vertue, or else to be fledde for their excellencie in vice, are meete to be chronicled” (C2r). The ultimate aim of history, Blundeville concludes, is to supply “perticular examples and experiences” (D3v-D4r) that conduce to both the “outward peace” of a commonwealth and “the inward peace of the heart, and mynde” (D3v). Such examples and experiences need no embellishment: a historian’s “office is to tell things as they vvere done vvithout either augmenting or diminishing them, or svvaruing one iote from the truth” (E4v). Conspicuously absent from Blundeville’s account is any acknowledgment of the pleasure that one might take in reading history. He writes dismissively of the historians who ply their trade “to deligthe the readers eares that reade only to passe avvay the time and such like” (F2v). History, it seems, can be either dulce or utile, but not both. Not all of Blundeville’s contemporaries took so severe a view of the historian’s task, but most of his readers would have accepted his central argument: that the best histories worked by example “to sturre vs, to verteous, honest, and commendable doinges” and “to dravve vs from vice, and dishonest dealing” (H2r).

Accordingly, I use the word “history” to denote both a genre and a belief more expansive than the bounds of that genre: that the principal goal of studying the past was to establish useful and untroubled connections between the dead and the living. This belief manifested itself in almost every aspect of intellectual activity in early modern Europe. D. R. Woolf makes a useful distinction between “the formal historical writing of an era” and “historical culture,” or “habits

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36 Thomas Blundeville, The true order and methode of wryting and reading hystories according to the precepts of Francisco Patricio, and Accontio Tridentino, two Italian writers, no lesse plainly than briefly, set forth in our vulgar speach, to the great profile and commoditye of all those that delight in hystories (London: William Seres, 1574).
of thought, languages, and media of communication, and patterns of social convention that embrace elite and popular, narrative and non-narrative modes of discourse.”

However, “formal historical writing” and “historical culture” shared one fundamental assumption: “To suggest that something was an improvement was, generally speaking, insufficient; it had to be shown as a manifest return to a socially sanctioned past whose authenticity was not in doubt.” Yet this “socially sanctioned past” was not necessarily a factual one. Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood argue that “[s]ocieties tend to coalesce around artifacts that embody institutions, but often on the condition that the historicity of these artifacts—as much as that of the institutions—is masked. . . . There is no premium placed on their historical moment of origin because they are supposed to deliver still older truths, or even timeless truths.” Timeless truths, in other words, draw their strength from a more or less fictional past. Whereas early modern historians downplay or overlook this paradox, writers of the new time embrace it. Hobbes, for instance, acknowledges blithely that the concept of a contract between subject and sovereign refers to a historical fiction. Through making explicit the inherent fictionality of the past, seventeenth-century authors found the freedom to reshape and reimagine the experience of time.

In their insistence on reasoning from effects to causes and back again, early modern historians diverged from the earlier tradition of chronicle or annal history, which arose in the Middle Ages and began to fade only in the Elizabethan period. Existing somewhere between timeline and narrative, chronicles enumerated political, natural, and supernatural events in a matter-of-fact catchall style that allowed readers to draw their own conclusions—or not. A brief

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38 Ibid., 52.
excerpt from John Stow’s *A summarie of Englyshe chronicles* (1565) will convey the flavor of the genre:

Anno. 24 [of the reign of Henry II].
In England fell greate wetherynge and tempest of thunder and lyghtening in the myddes of wynter: and in Sommer folowing fell hayle of suche greatnes that it slewe bothe man and beast.

Anno. 26.
At this tyme were manye Iewes in Englande, whiche agaynste the feast of Easter did vse to sacrifice yong children in despite of christen religion.

Anno. 28.
Henry the eldest sonne of Henry of Englande ended his lyfe. Shortly after began the warre betwene kyng Henry and Philyp of France for homage that the Frenche kyng required to be done for the lands of Poytow, and other, and for the castell of Gysours.41

Woolf notes that “the virtual end of chronicle publication in England . . . coincided with the first wave of corantos and newsbooks. The chronicler could no longer claim to be the primary or even an effective recorder of the events of the present, since the very notion of the ‘present’ and the universe of literary genres used to represent it had changed.”42 From the events of the past, meanwhile, readers now demanded moral and political utility as well as narrative coherence: “Digression, irrelevance, and triviality seemed to many seventeenth-century historians and their readers to be the essence of chronicles.”43 I propose, however, that aspects of the chronicle genre reappear in the literature of the new time: a meandering, disjointed style; an emphasis on time’s relationship to the material and tangible; and, most significantly, a refusal to draw unambiguous conclusions from any series of events.

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These features of the chronicle genre are also features of Pyrrhonian skepticism, which “was triumphing over accepted views at the outset of the seventeenth century” both in England and on the Continent.\textsuperscript{44} All of the authors I discuss in the following chapters evince an inclination toward skeptical thought, or at least, to use Gerard Passannante’s phrase, a “vulnerability to” it.\textsuperscript{45} In “An Apologie of Raymond Sebond,” Montaigne articulates one of the central principles of the new time: “In naturall things the effects doe but halfe referre their causes.”\textsuperscript{46} Significantly, Montaigne’s Essais diverge from the skepticism of Sextus Empiricus and other classical philosophers, for whom ataraxia is the goal of the suspension of knowledge. By contrast, writes Vicente Raga Rosaleny, “Montaigne does not aspire to a stable and definitive philosophy. He always remained fascinated by the incessant movement of the phenomenal world and was perpetually unsatisfied with the idea of a stable spirit. In this way, his skepticism was genuinely zetetic, as defined by Sextus as ‘investigation without end.’”\textsuperscript{47} Skepticism, in other words, was fundamentally opposed to the hermetic narratives and moral certainties of humanist historiography.

Montaigne’s motile, dynamic skepticism lent itself readily to new theories of temporality. “Do not so much as not believe a man,” writes Donne in the Anniversaries, a text in which all natural and historical causes collapse into one unverifiable cause: the death of Elizabeth Drury. Gianni Paganini argues that Leviathan betrays the influence of French skeptics like Montaigne, Pierre Charron, and François de La Mothe Le Vayer, especially in Hobbes’s “shift from the

\textsuperscript{45} Passannante, \textit{Lucretian Renaissance}, 9.
\textsuperscript{46} Montaigne, \textit{Essays written in French by Michael Lord of Montaigne}, 297. For Montaigne’s skepticism, see Chapter Three, “Michel de Montaigne and the Nouveaux Pyrrhoniens,” in Popkin, \textit{History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle}, 89-117.
hierarchical and moncausal theory of the *Elements [of Law] . . . to the more descriptive one of Leviathan*." According to Dominick Grundy, *Hydriotaphia* echoes Montaigne’s *De la vanité* in its contention that “man’s claim to bring order into the world is false, that he cannot perceive beyond confusion and contradiction.” Finally, Marvell’s poetic experiments with natural time recalls the writing of such *libertins érudits* as Hobbes’s friend Pierre Gassendi, who argued for “an acceptance of the world of experience or appearance as the sole basis for our natural knowledge,” which must therefore always be imperfect. For many thinkers, the technological advances of the new science merely reified the limits of human understanding: “To rely on the authority of instruments was to admit that the human eye is nothing but an instrument, and a weak one at that. . . . Paradoxically, accurate scientific observation and the naturalized understanding of the senses detached the intellect from its objects and meant that, fundamentally, we are always wrong.” A temporality informed by this assumption demanded a literary form more fragmented than history.

Perhaps the most vivid example of the chronicle’s incursion into the literature of time is Wye Saltonstall’s 1638 satire *A description of time applied to this present time*, narrated by Time himself. Saltonstall, a poet and translator of Ovid, imagines Time as an irascible old man incensed at the folly of the age. Time begins his complaint with a poem lamenting that people censure him instead of the times in which they live:

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You oftentimes doe wish that I would stay,
When you are at the Ale-house, or at play:
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But never thinke that Time with his sharpe Sithe,
Mowes downe by houres and daies your mortal life.
And when you commit any wickednesse,
And thereby bring your selves to great distresse,
Then with poore Time you presently are mad,
And thinke me evill because you are bad. (A3r).

Lapsing into prose, Time issues a series of “Orders to be observed,” loosely grouped according to the physical senses. He mandates that “Red Noses shal grow pale, bald crownes be cover’d with Perriwigs, [and] Wenches shall never walke in their dreames stark naked”; that “Mustard and Hartichoaks, or clowted Creame and Uineger shal never be served up together” (A6v); that “Foot-men shall be compell’d to change their Socks twice a day, or else not to come in their Ladies presence” (A7v); and that “all Bils and Bonds bearing no Date, shal bee payd in the yeere One Thousand sixe Hundred and never” (B2r). He concludes with a series of injunctions against spending time unwisely, whether by “Drinking untill Midnight, sleeping untill Noone, dressing untill Dinner-time, Starching on Sundayes, working on Holy dayes, tedious trimmings at the Barbers, [or] following costly Suites in Law” (B2v). Both poem and prose draw a sharp distinction between Time as a concept (or, here, a character) and the times (tempora). By Time’s own account, he is connected only semantically to “the times,” a category that consists of people and their actions: “the vice and vanity of the world” (A2v). His sole purpose is to devour us “by houres and daies,” and he resents any distraction from his task.

Time’s tirade, like many seventeenth-century narratives of temporality, troubles the concepts of time that we now take for granted. If Time somehow stands outside tempora, then the force that moves the times forward and ensures changes in customs and fashions is not time itself but misguided human will. But should we take Time at his word? After all, the satire’s style and typeface situate Time in a specific, and bygone, era. While the prefatory poem is

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52 Wye Saltonstall, A description of time applied to this present time. With times merry orders to be observed (London: John Okes, 1633).
printed in roman type, Time’s “Orders to be observed” are in blackletter, which by 1638 appeared mainly in royal proclamations and other official documents.  

53 John Okes’s choice of typeface thus fits the mock-formal character of Time’s pronouncements, but it also conveys a sense of anachronism: blackletter had fallen out of common use by 1600, and would have impressed Saltonstall’s Caroline readers as “[s]trikingly old-fashioned[.]”  

54 Time’s rambling, disconnected style is similarly outmoded, borrowing heavily from such Elizabethan prose satires as Thomas Nashe’s *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594). Nashe’s preface addresses the unbookish “dapper Mounsier Pages of the Court,” requesting that if they do not read Jack Wilton’s tale, they at least put the pages to honorable use:

> If there be some [pages] better than other, he craues you would honor them in their death so much, as to drie and kindle *Tobacco* with them: for a need hee permits you to wrap veluet pantofles in them also, so they be not woe begone at the heeles, or weather-beaten like a blacke head with graye haires, or mangie at the toes like an ape about the mouth. But as you loue good fellowship . . . rather turne them to stop mustard-pots, than the Grocers shuld haue one patch of them to wrap mace in: a strong hot costly spice it is, which above all things [Jack] hates.  

55 Like Nashe, Saltonstall creates a sensorium of minor irritants, a wonder cabinet of the ignoble details that historians would ignore. But by linking that sensorium to a particular literary era, he undercuts Time’s claims to timelessness. Saltonstall’s Time is petty, irritable, and unable to abstract himself from materiality. He is, in other words, exactly what history is not: Saltonstall’s “description of time” out-chronicles chronicle itself. Patricia Fumerton argues that the early

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53 Interestingly, however, Charles I’s 1633 reissue of his father’s *Book of Sports* is printed in roman. See Charles I, *The Kings Maiesties declaration to his subiects, concerning lawfull sports to bee vsed* (London: Robert Barker, 1633).

54 Charles C. Mish, “Black Letter as a Social Discriminant in the Seventeenth Century,” *PMLA*, vol. 68, no. 3 (June 1953), 628.

moderns perceived “history as brokenness,” a proposition that I would modify slightly.  

Most early modern historians were devoted to reassembling the shards of the past, not leaving them to lie as they had fallen. The seventeenth-century literature of temporality, however, is inherently a literature of brokenness.

Throughout the century, advances in both chronometric technology and antiquarian study strengthened the perceived connection between time and material objects, often fragmentary or unreliable ones. According to detractors, pocket watches and ancient artifacts turned the measurement of time into a pastime, leading their devotees to prize time for itself and not for what they could accomplish within it. Perhaps the most lucid critical comparison of watches and antiquities appears in Shackerley Marmion’s comedy The Antiquary, written in the mid-1630s and printed posthumously in 1641. The play equates the follies of two superficially different men: Veterano, the titular antiquary, who “sits / All day in contemplation of a statue / With ne’re a nose” (C1r), and the vacuous fop Petrutio, who spends much of the first act praising his own pocket watch.  

Through their incessant pursuit of antiquity and novelty, both characters reduce time to a collection of vendible commodities. Jessica Wolfe notes the existence of an early modern debate over “the ideational role that machines play in sanctioning or condemning instrumentality and artifice.” For my purposes, the word “objects” can replace “machines,” especially as “there is no such thing as technology before around the middle of the seventeenth century. While there are many texts depicting mechanical devices, there is little if any categorical distinction between mechanics and other intellectual disciplines.” In modern discourse,

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antiquities and watches generally inhabit different categories. In *The Antiquary*, however, they both function as timepieces: that is, pieces of embodied time. They sit uneasily on the fringes of conventional historiography, arousing what Fumerton describes as the early modern mind’s ‘fear of the naked datum, of the fact that seems mere fact unsupported by any continuous structure or ground.’

Embedded in sensory experience, the new time resists abstraction.

In the first act of *The Antiquary*, Veterano’s penniless nephew Lionell tries in vain to borrow money from wealthy young Petrutio, who has recently “been abroad in quest of strange fashions” (B1v):

*Pet.* And now you talk of time, what time of day is’t by your Watch?

*Lio.* I have none, Sir.

*Pet.* How, ne’re a Watch? oh monstrous! how do you consume your hours, ne’re a Watch? ’tis the greatest solecisme in society that e’re I heard of: ne’re a Watch?

*Lio.* How deeply you conceive of it?

*Pet.* You have not a Gentleman, that’s a true Gentleman, without one; ’tis the main Appendix to a Plush-lyning: besides, it helps much to discourse; for, while others confer Notes together, we confer our Watches, and spend good part of the day with talking of it.

(B2r)

This exchange contains multiple ironies dear to early modern satirists and moralists. Pocket watches arrived in England around the 1580s and became more widely available in the early seventeenth century. Until the Restoration, however, they were both expensive and inaccurate, functioning primarily as ornaments and status symbols. Though David S. Landes characterizes the early modern pocket watch as “prod and key to personal achievement and productivity,” writers like Marmion portray it as exactly the opposite: a device that helps its owner “consume

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60 Fumerton, *Cultural Aesthetics*, 2.
61 John Rogers of Chacombe, *A discourse of Christian watchfulnesse. Preparing how to liue, how to die, and to be discharged at the day of judgement, and so enioy life eternall* (London: William Jones, 1620), 367.
Indeed, the people most capable of affording watches often seemed to have least need of them, and the figure of the foppish, time-wasting watch owner quickly entered the realm of cliché. In his 1628 character book *Micro-cosmographie*, whose influence is visible throughout *The Antiquary*, John Earle describes “A Gallant” as a man who, “[t]hough his life passe somewhat slidingly, yet he seemes very carefull of the time, for hee is still drawing his Watch out of his Poket, and spends part of his houres in numbring them.” In a final irony, the phrase “pocket watch” suggests a device meant for private use, yet the continual necessity of winding and resetting a watch gave “Phantasticks” the perfect excuse to “draw all occasions to draw it out to be seen.” The pocket watch was the first mobile device, bestowing cultural cachet on its bearer even as it attracted criticism for the distractions it offered.

Petrutio and his friends could “spend good part of the day” comparing the readings of their watches because, before Christiaan Huygens invented the balance spring in 1657, personal timepieces were notoriously inaccurate. Prior to the Restoration, literary characters often adduce “the disagreement of our Watches” as an excuse for tardiness. For Petrutio, however, the chief drawback of the pocket watch is also its chief attraction, as it introduces a social aspect into the private activity of telling time. Petrutio has no real need to ask for the time: his observation that “it draws neer Noon” indicates that he has either produced his own watch or

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64 Thomas Fuller, *The holy state* (Cambridge: Roger Daniel, 1642), 259.
65 Huygens’s innovation reduced the error of the average watch “from a half-hour or more per day to . . . within five minutes,” which “brought watch performance very close to the standard we now employ in ordering life and work.” Landes, *Revolution in Time*, 128.
66 Walter Charleton, *The immortality of the human soul, demonstrated by the light of nature in two dialogues* (London: William Wilson, 1657), 55: “I See you are very precise in keeping your time prefix’t, Athanasius; And I hope, I have not made you stay, many minutes, for me. If I have, you must impute it to the disagreement of our Watches, not to any tardiness in my self; For, I assure you, I was here before you, in my desires.”
glanced at the position of the sun. He asks the question not to orient himself within a larger, more objective temporality, but to amuse himself with the difference between his watch and Lionell’s. What Landes terms the “privatization (personalization) of time” might have been a weaker force if early modern watches had been more precise.67 One’s time was one’s own not only because it was embodied in a personal timepiece, but also because no two timepieces offered the same readings. Accordingly, seventeenth-century discussions of pocket watches betray an anxiety about technology’s potential to render its users overconfident in their judgments of the world:

   [Y]ea, I knew a Lord, who journeying in the Country, would leap out of his coach, to play a game at stooleball with Country Wenches; and one time above the rest; when a Gentleman of his told him it was past three a clock, and that they had yet twenty miles to ride, he called for a watch, and set it back to twelve, now said my Lord, we shall have time enough; I will have the other game.68

Petrutio likewise conflates his temporality with his ego, showing himself both possessive of his own time and eager to make his acquaintances waste theirs. “Presently Ile be at leisure to talk with you,” he tells Lionell when first approached; “’tis no small point in State-policie, still to pretend onely to be thought a man of action, and rather than want a colour, be busied with a mans owne self.” For Marmion and other writers, the new time produced a dangerous over-reliance on “a mans owne self.”

   Though the studious Veterano would seem at first glance to be Petrutio’s opposite and not his double, both characters make the same mistake in devoting themselves too passionately to the material trappings of time. As my third chapter will discuss in greater detail, seventeenth-century England saw the rise of both antiquarianism and anti-antiquarian satire. Antiquaries like William Camden and Sir Robert Cotton improved the reputation of their field by presenting it to

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68 Henry Peacham, *Coach and sedan, pleasantly disputing for place and precedence the brewers-cart being moderator* (London: Robert Raworth, 1636), D1r. For a nearly identical version of this joke published four decades later, see Richard Head, *Nugae venales or, Complaisant companion being new jests, domestick and forreign, bulls, rhodomontados, pleasant novels and miscellanies* (London: W. D., 1675), 222.
readers as a subcategory of history, a patriotic endeavor meant to enrich the dialogue between past and present in modern Britain. Critics rejected this proposed connection to historiography and stressed the material aspects of antiquarianism: the dust, the rot, the darkness, and the obsession that seemed to border on idolatry. Lionell complains that his uncle “dotes on the decays./ With greater love, than the self-lov’d Narcissus/ Did on his beauty” (C1r), a comparison that recalls Petrutio’s vanity. Gazing at his own timepieces, the antiquary sees nothing but himself.

Veterano’s antiquities, however, offer a warped mirror. He claims to own such pieces as “Hanniballs spectacles,” explaining that “after he grew dim with dust in following the Camp, he wore spectacles” (H4v). In early modern Europe, artifacts, like pocket watches, often told the wrong time: Grafton notes that the “flood of new texts and information . . . was polluted by streams of fraudulent matter. The new forgery stemmed less from practical needs than from nostalgia. It aimed above all at recreating a past even more to the taste of modern readers and scholars than was the real antiquity uncovered by technical scholarship.” Veterano expresses a particularly crude manifestation of this principle: he sees in his collection exactly what he wants to see. Yet his relationship to its authenticity, or lack thereof, never becomes clear. Has Veterano knowingly amassed a hoard of worthless items, or has he been taken in by a series of shameless forgers? Is he a dupe, a con man, or somehow both? Late in the play, he falls for Lionell’s scheme to pass off a sheaf of old papers as “the writings of some Prophetesse” (G1v), which would indicate more gullibility than shrewdness. Yet Veterano also displays a canny business sense, declaring that “the very dust that cleaves to one of those Monuments, is more worth than

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the oare of twenty Mines” and encouraging his servant Petro to adopt the air of a traveling salesman and “advance [his] voice in their commendation” (D4r-v). Ultimately, it matters little to the play whether Veterano truly believes that he owns “the great silver box that Nero kept his beard in” (D4v). His stance on temporal accuracy resembles Petrutio’s: both men value the mere existence of their timepieces over the correctness of the information that those objects transmit. As the reading on Petrutio’s watch is Petrutio’s own, so the factual status of Veterano’s antiquities is Veterano’s own.

Marmion’s critique of the new time is also a critique of fashion, and particularly of fashion’s potential to undermine the enduring truths of history. Veterano may rail against his era’s “new inventions of fashions” (E1r), but he is no less a dedicated follower of fashion than Petrutio. “Fashion takes from the past not to redress a lack, not to dress its naked body, but needlessly, excessively, and as a result emerges misshapen, a monstrous fabrication,” Nagel argues. Veterano’s is a reverse foppery, a restless and misguided pursuit of antiquity, not novelty, for its own sake. This is a common complaint in early Stuart drama: Ben Jonson’s 1625 comedy The Staple of News, for instance, links England’s growing desire for domestic and international news to the hunger of town fops for modish suits. The rich, remarks one character, “contemplate nothing/ But the vile sordid things of time, place, money, / And let the noble, and the precious goe[.]” Marmion may equate the backward-looking antiquary with the novelty-seeking dandy, but he does not fully excavate the political implications of that equation. That task fell to a later author: the portrait miniaturist Thomas Flatman, whose satirical anthology

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71 Ben Jonson, Bartholomew fayre : a comedie, acted in the yeare, 1614 by the Lady Elizabeths seruants, and then dedicated to King Iames, of most blessed memorie ; The diuell is an asse : a comedie acted in the yeare, 1616, by His Maiesties seruants : The staple of newes : a comedie acted in the yeare, 1625, by His Maiesties seruants by the author, Benjamin Johnson (London: I. B., 1631), 43.
Naps upon Parnassus (1658) contains two verbal miniatures of its own: “The Character of a Temporizer” and “The Character of an Antiquarian.” Flatman’s temporizer follows political and religious, not sartorial, modes, but still merits the vocabulary of foppery: “He is One, that is alwayes in fashion; though Time puts on New Clothes every Day” (E4r). Instead of carrying a watch, the temporizer is himself a timepiece: “Look in his face, and you may see what a Clock ’tis though the Sun don’t Shine” (E4v). The antiquary likewise lacks intellectual method or integrity, “confin[ing] a Cluster of Ages into the narrow Compass of his own” (F3v). Flatman’s two characters “both keep a general meeting in this, that they are Men of the Times; a pair of petty Haberdasher’d Chronologers, which keep a circumspect notary of Novelties, that so he may the better see which way the winde fits” (F3v). The marvelous adjective “haberdashered” captures the mercenary quality of men who, despite their pretensions, write not histories but inventories.

Despite their evident scorn for the individualistic and materialistic temporalities of their era, satirists like Marmion and Flatman are almost as instrumental as Hobbes or Marvell in constructing the new time. After all, to satirize a phenomenon is to acknowledge and even perpetuate its existence. I use the phrase “the new time” not to connote an ideology with clear-cut advocates and detractors, but to suggest a more complex and diffuse reckoning with the changing nature of temporal knowledge in the seventeenth century. Donne, Hobbes, Browne, and Marvell express skepticism toward the priorities of historiography, but also toward intellectual innovation. They participate in early modern historical culture even as they test its limits. Nor do they all reshape linear temporality in the same way. Donne’s Anniversaries (1611-12) encourage the reader to view her own world as a post-apocalyptic wasteland in which the “orderly

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72 Thomas Flatman, Naps upon Parnassus. A sleepy Muse nipt and pincht, though not awakened Such Voluntary and Jovial Copies of Verses, as were lately receiv’d from some of the WITS of the Universities, in a Frolick, dedicated to Gondibert's Mistress by Captain Jones and others (London: printed for N. Brook, 1658).
vicissitude of years” comprises not time but mere “show.” Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (1651) weaponizes a materialist account of time against those who weaken the commonwealth by overvaluing the intellectual authority of the past, while *Behemoth, or the Long Parliament* (c. 1668) invokes ancient dialogues that privilege leisure over action. Browne’s antiquarian treatise *Hydriotaphia, or Urne-Buriall* (1658) downplays the relevance of antiquities to Protectorate England, instead envisioning “a new Britannia” untrammeled by her past. Marvell’s interregnum poems, particularly “Upon Appleton House” and “An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell’s Return from Ireland,” draw on the philosophical libertinism of continental Europe to create an anti-historical temporality rooted in nature and individual experience. What these texts all have in common, however, is a tacit or explicit acceptance of time’s ability to sever past from present.

In *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), Francis Bacon likens “civile” or human history to “three kinds of Pictures or Images: for of Pictures or Images, wee see some are Vnfinished, some are parfite, and some are defaced.” The “unfinished” category includes “the naked euents and actions” of the past, while the “defaced” category comprises antiquities and other “remnants of history, which have casually escaped the shipwracke of time.”73 The most polished variety of civil history, “parfite” or perfect history, falls into three subtypes: “chronicles” of entire eras, “lives” of individuals, and “narrations” of actions. The texts discussed in the following chapters constitute yet another category, which we might term “imperfect history”: the history of private words and actions, subjective temporal experience, and individual potential. The speaker of the *Anniversaries* proposes that the fundamental act of historical imagination—discerning cause and effect, or “measuring future things from things before”—has become impossible: “‘Tis all in

pieces, all coherence gone; / All just supply, and all relation.” In a world all in pieces, there can be no perfect history.
Chapter One: Undead Time

[As if when after Phebus is dessended
and leves a light mich like the past dayes dawninge,
and every toyle and labor wholly ended
each livinge creature draweth to his restinge
wee should beginn by such a partinge light
to write the story of all ages past
and end the same before th’approchinge night.

—Sir Walter Ralegh, “The Ocean to Cynthia”

1. The Experience of the Anniversaries

In late 1610 or early 1611, John Donne set himself the awkward task of writing a series of elegies for a fourteen-year-old girl whom he had never met. The only child of the courtier Sir Robert Drury, Elizabeth Drury was a private citizen who, from the point of view of history, had done and said nothing in particular before her sudden death. But in Donne’s Anniversaries, a collection of three elegiac poems published in 1611 and 1612, what Drury did and said is less important than what she was. The first poem in the series, The First Anniversary: An Anatomy of the World, constructs an eerie dreamscape with Drury at its center. In life, according to the speaker, Drury functioned as the “intrinsic balm” and “preservative” (I.57) of sublunary existence and the universal standard of proportion and measurement; she was no less than the

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75 Portions of this chapter appear in my article “Vicissitude of Years: Temporal Experience in Donne’s Anniversaries,” forthcoming in Studies in Philology. I also presented portions of this chapter at the Northeastern Modern Language Association (NeMLA) conference in Toronto in May 2015.
76 The exact dating of the Anatomy and Funeral Elegy is still a matter for debate. Elizabeth Drury was buried on Dec. 17, 1610. Robin Robbins believes that Donne wrote the Funeral Elegy first, in December 1610 or early 1611, due to the poem’s comparative brevity and “its sharing of material with the 1609 Markham and Bulstrode elegies, with less striking hints of the strategy of the more ambitious FirAn [Anatomy].” It is also unclear whether Robert Drury’s patronage of Donne preceded or followed the composition of the Anatomy, especially as the two had probably acquainted before 1610. See John Donne, The Complete Poems of John Donne, ed. Robin Robbins (Harlow, UK: Longman, 2010), 811-814, 860-861.
world’s “soul” (I.54), the animating force of nature and time. In her absence, the world has “crumbled out again t’his atomies” (I.212), and the poem itself performs an “anatomy” (anatomy) or dissection of the decaying corpse: the corpse not of Drury but of the world her virtue sustained. A Funeral Elegy, the Anatomy’s shorter companion poem, distinguishes even more starkly between action and being. Donne likens the various statuses and occupations of humanity to the limbs and organs of the human body: “The world contains / Princes for arms, and counselors for brains, / Lawyers for tongues, divines for hearts, and more” (FE 21-23). Instead of participating in the business of the world, Drury supplied “those fine spirits which do tune and set / This organ” (FE 27-28). The third elegy, The Second Anniversary, or the Progress of the Soul, proposes that time itself has disintegrated in Drury’s absence, and that what we measure in “orderly vicissitude of years” is not time but the mere “show” of it (II.25-26). In a world that somehow lingers after the end of time, our accumulation of historical facts—“what Caesar did, yea, and what Cic’ro said” (II.287)—becomes futile, even wicked. Elizabeth Drury’s silence and obscurity make her a worthier subject for Donne’s elegy than Caesar or Cicero, distinguished respectively for actions and words. Drury’s historical, or anti-historical, power lies in her very insignificance.

Paradoxically, the Anniversaries marked the beginning of the end of Donne’s own social insignificance. For almost a decade, Donne had suffered financial and professional difficulties stemming from his elopement with Anne More in 1601. R. C. Bald describes the period between 1607 and 1610 as “probably the most disturbed and anxious years of Donne’s life”—three years characterized by depression, repeated failures to obtain employment in London, and “a spiritual

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77 All citations of Donne’s poems from The Complete Poems of John Donne, ed. Robbins. Throughout this chapter, I will refer to the First Anniversary as “the Anatomy,” its original title, and the Second Anniversary as “the Progress.” In my parenthetical citations, the First Anniversary will appear as “I,” the Funeral Elegy as “FE,” and the Second Anniversary as “II.” Line 12 of the Anatomy, for instance, will appear in parentheses as “I.12.”
crisis which was in large measure concealed from those closest to him.”

Donne forsook poetry almost entirely in the first decade of the century, turning instead to prose controversy. In *Biathanatos*, Donne aims to “remove scandal” from the act of suicide; in *Pseudo-Martyr*, he counsels Roman Catholics to take James I’s oath of allegiance instead of perpetrating “an inordinate and corrupt affectation of Martyrdom”; and in the Menippean prose satire *Ignatius his Conclave*, probably written to solicit royal patronage, he attacks the intellectual “innovation” of the Jesuits by way of a dream vision set in hell.

The *Anatomy* and *Funeral Elegy* were Donne’s first major poems since *Metempsychosis* (1601). Unlike the impious *Metempsychosis*, however, they were composed in the hopes of securing a patron. And unlike *Ignatius his Conclave*, which seems not to have attracted James’s attention, the *Anatomy* and *Funeral Elegy* accomplished their purpose.

Donne’s praise of Elizabeth Drury, “that rich soul” (I.1), often sounds very much like personal gratitude for her influence in “this last, long night” (I.69).

By his own admission, Donne “never saw the gentlewoman” he immortalized in the *Anniversaries*, but he was no stranger to her family. Donne was connected to Elizabeth’s parents through his brother-in-law William Lyly, who had lived with the Drurys in Hawstead.

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79 John Donne, *Biathanatos a declaration of that paradoxe or thesis, that selfe-homicide is not so naturally sinne, that it may never be otherwise: wherein the nature and the extent of all those lawes, which seeme to be violated by this act, are diligently surveyed* (London: printed by John Dawson, 1644), 23; *Pseudo-martyr Wherein out of certaine propositions and gradations, this conclusion is evicted. That those which are of the Romane religion in this kingdome, may and ought to take the Oath of allegiance* (London: printed by W. Stansby for Walter Burre, 1610), 9; *Ignatius his conclawe or his inthronisation in a late election in hell: wherein many things are mingled by way of satyr; concerning the disposition of Jesuits, the creation of a new hell, the establishing of a church in the moone* (London: printed by Nicholas Okes for Richard More, 1611), 6. For a discussion of *Ignatius his Conclave* and the genre of Menippean satire, see Eugene Korkowski, “Donne’s *Ignatius* and Menippean Satire,” *Studies in Philology* 72:4 (Oct. 1975), 419-438. Korkowski argues that Donne modeled *Ignatius* on “earlier Renaissance Menippean satires, particularly those which centered on theological controversies,” such as *Julius Excluded from Heaven* (1514), generally attributed to Erasmus.
80 On the *Anniversaries* as a work composed for and within patronage, see Arthur F. Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet* (London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 235-245. Marotti reads the poems as “patronage verse reflecting Donne’s continuing desire for advancement and his ambivalent attitude toward the world in which he hoped to prosper” (235).
Suffolk, from the 1590s until his death in 1603. Lyly’s close friendship with Sir Robert Drury suffered a blow in 1601, when twenty-seven-year-old Joseph Hall, the future bishop of Norwich, became rector of Hawstead. Hall immediately took a dislike to Lyly, whom he describes in his 1647 memoir as “a witty and bold Atheist” who opposed Hall’s pastoral efforts at every turn. With decidedly unchristian self-satisfaction, Hall even takes credit for Lyly’s death from plague in London in 1603: “I bent my prayers against him, beseeching God daily, that he would be pleased to remove by some means or other, that apparent hindrance of my faithful Labours, who gave me an answer accordingly[.]” However, Hall’s feud with Lyly did have one favorable outcome: it was through Lyly that Hall met Donne, brother to Lyly’s wife Anne and just two years older than Hall himself. The young rector left Hawstead in 1607, complaining that his paltry stipend from Drury obliged him “to write books to buy books,” but his friendship with Donne held firm: so firm, in fact, that Hall wrote two prefatory poems for the 1612 edition of the *Anniversaries*, despite his distaste for Robert Drury’s philistinism.

Donne’s connections to Lyly and Hall likely brought him into Robert Drury’s acquaintance at some point before Elizabeth’s death. By November 1611, Donne was close enough to the Drurys that he accompanied them on a visit to the Continent shortly after the publication of the *Anatomy* and *Funeral Elegy*. He wrote his third elegy for Elizabeth Drury, *The Second Anniversary, or the Progress of the Soul*, in France, “a place where mis-devotion frames / A thousand prayers to saints whose very names / The ancient Church knew not, Heaven

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83 Joseph Hall, *The shaking of the olive-tree the remaining works of that incomparable prelate Joseph Hall D. D. late lord bishop of Norwich : with some specialties of divine providence in his life, noted by his own hand : together with his Hard measure, written also by himself* (London: printed by J. Cadwel for J. Crooke, 1660), 13-14.
84 John Donne, *An Anatomy of the World. Wherein, by occasion of the untimely death of Mistris Elizabeth Drvry the frailty and the decay of this whole world is represented* (London: printed by William Stansby for Samuel Macham, 1611). In this edition, as in the 1612 edition containing all three poems, the *Anatomy* precedes the *Funeral Elegy*. 
knows not yet” (II.511-513). Donne then sent the Progress to London, where all three poems were published in the spring of 1612, with the Funeral Elegy placed between the Anatomy and the Progress.\(^{85}\) Distributing poetry in print was an unusual step for Donne, and the Anniversaries is certainly the longest and most ambitious poetic work that Donne allowed to be printed.\(^{86}\) It also proved one of the most controversial.

Practically since the publication of the Anniversaries, readers have deemed Elizabeth Drury a flimsy foundation for the baroque architecture of the poems, not to mention an unworthy subject for Donne’s hyperbolic praise. Writing to his close friend Henry Goodyer in 1612, Donne notes that “I hear from England of many censures of my book, of Mrs. Drury,” and regrets “my descent in Printing any thing in verse[.]”\(^{87}\) Donne’s censurers noted the incongruity between the facts of Elizabeth Drury’s life and the language and imagery of the Anniversaries: in Donne’s exquisitely coy phrase, “that I have said so much.”\(^{88}\) The best-known contemporary criticism of the Anniversaries comes from Ben Jonson, for whose Volpone Donne had written a prefatory poem in 1607. In the winter of 1618-19, Jonson told William Drummond “[t]hat Donnes Anniversarie was profane and full of Blasphemies: that he told Mr Donne, if it had been written of the Virgin Marie it had been something; to which [Donne] answered, that he described the

\(^{85}\) John Donne, The first anniuersarie An anatomie of the vvorld. Wherein, by occasion of the vntimely death of Mistris Elizabeth Drury, the frailtie and the decay of this whole world is represented (London: printed by M. Bradwood for Samuel Macham, 1612). Though the poems are known today as the Anniversaries, they were not published under that title in the seventeenth century.

\(^{86}\) “Seven poems, totaling 1302 lines (or 14 percent of the known canon), were issued during Donne’s lifetime in what may be termed ‘authorized’ printings, appearing at least with his acquiescence if not always with his wholehearted endorsement, and thereby passed into general circulation.” Ted-Larry Pebworth, “John Donne, Coterie Poetry, and the Text as Performance,” SEL 29 (1989), 61. Pebworth identifies the seven poems as “the two ‘Anniversaries’ with their accompanying ‘Funeral Elegie,’ the English poem and the macaronic quatrain on Coryat’s Crudities, the elegy on the death of Prince Henry, and the Latin tribute to Jonson’s Volpone.”

\(^{87}\) John Donne, Letters to severall persons of honour written by John Donne (London: J. Flesher, 1651), 74-75. This edition identifies the recipient erroneously as “Sir G. F.”

\(^{88}\) Ibid.
Idea of a Woman, and not as she was.**89** Donne’s rejoinder clearly failed to satisfy Jonson, and no wonder: instead of engaging with Jonson’s argumentative terms (theologically sound vs. blasphemous), Donne substituted his own terms (biographically accurate vs. inaccurate). Using the language of worship to describe “the Idea of a Woman” is still blasphemous. Hence Jonson’s complaint to Drummond, and hence the appeal of Drummond’s account to generations of scholars. Donne’s shameless evasion of Jonson’s criticism mirrors the *Anniversaries*’ shameless evasion of the reader’s critical faculties. From the first lines, we stand on shaky ontological ground, never knowing which parts of the *Anniversaries* are fiction, metaphor, allegory, exaggeration, or—least likely of all—reality. The terms of our engagement with the poems are constantly shifting: the more we read, the less we know.

In his letter to Goodyer, Donne speculates that the public “will soon give over” their objections to his praise of Elizabeth Drury when they realize that “it became me to say, not what I was sure was just truth, but the best that I could conceive; for that had been a new weakness in me, to have praised anybody in printed verses, that had not been capable of the best praise that I could give.” Four centuries have since passed, but Donne’s readers have yet to accept that the *Anniversaries* are simply a biography writ large. Edward Tayler devotes an entire monograph to the phrase “Idea of a Woman,” concluding that Donne’s “idea” is a Ciceronian corruption of the Platonic *idea* (“form”) to mean both an object of thought and a thought that one has about an object.90 For Barbara Lewalski, the “she” of the *Anniversaries* (Donne never mentions Drury by

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90 “Cicero . . . seems to want to be able to talk about ‘ideas’ as objects of thought (found through ‘recollection’ of the Platonic realm in which they subsist) and about ‘ideas’ as thoughts in themselves, rattling around in the minds of human beings.” Edward W. Tayler, *Donne’s Idea of a Woman: Structure and Meaning in the Anniversaries* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1991), 25.
name) functions as a “poetic symbol”: “If the poems are to be taken seriously . . . then the ‘shee’ whose death brought the world to its moribund condition must be a cause adequate to the impressive effects described.” Other scholars base their readings on the subtitle of the *Anatomy*: “Wherein, by Occasion of the Untimely Death of Mistress Elizabeth Drury, the Frailty and the Decay of this Whole World is Represented.” Drury thus constitutes an “occasion” or pretext for Donne to discuss something else: himself, God, or the reader’s own inward experience. John Carey advances the most extreme version of this reading, interpreting the “she” of the *Anniversaries* as an excuse for a linguistic experiment “cut loose from any semblance of sense.” Despite their differences, these arguments all agree on one point: that, in Earl Miner’s words, “the death of a fourteen-year-old girl does not seem to rank as a cause with the fall of man or new assumptions about the nature of the world.”

The identity of the speaker of the *Anniversaries* has attracted far less scholarly interest than the identity of the “she” whom he commemorates. H. L. Meakin sums up the psychological resistance that the *Anniversaries* arouse in many readers: “Who is this Elizabeth Drury to be so extravagantly launched into immortality and the literary stratosphere, we ask?” But for the purposes of this chapter, we might well rephrase Meakin’s question: who is the speaker to so

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92 See, for instance, Richard E. Hughes, “The Woman in Donne’s Anniversaries,” *ELH* 34:3 (Sep. 1967), and Ruth A. Fox, “Donne’s Anniversaries and the Art of Living,” *ELH* 38:4 (Dec. 1971). Hughes argues that “the subject and the auditory is not Elizabeth and Sir Robert Drury, but John Donne” (312). For Fox, the “she” of the Anniversaries “is all sentence and no letter, and her meaning evolves into Donne’s life, which is writing verse.”


95 Meakin, *John Donne’s Articulations of the Feminine*, 201.
extravagantly launch her there? A discrepancy between style and subject is characteristic of early modern elegy; less characteristic is an elegiac speaker who, in Lewalski’s words, “professes to speak of the real world and for us all.”96 Donne’s speaker is a a condescending busybody on a transcendental level, a figure about whom we know little but that he knows exactly what is good for us. Some critics take the speaker as “Donne himself as narrator and surrogate hero.”97 Others treat him as a discrete character within Donne’s poetic world, but focus primarily on his relationship to the “she” figure. For Lewalski, the speaker’s distinctiveness is one of genre, not of character: he enables Donne to “transform the conventional mode of complimentary verse into a fit vehicle for symbolic subjects.”98 I propose, however, that M. Thomas Hester’s observation about Donne’s early satires is equally applicable to the Anniversaries: the poems’ “initial and final concern . . . is with the concomitant hatred and charity of the satirist himself.”99 The speaker of the Anniversaries adopts multiple rhetorical stances—satirical anatomist of the world’s vices, commemorator of Elizabeth Drury, prophet of apocalypse—but he attempts throughout to superimpose his experience of the world over the reader’s and, occasionally, over Elizabeth Drury’s. To put it another way, few early modern elegies end with a long meditation on the progress of the speaker’s own soul toward heaven.

The lugubrious speaker of the Anniversaries has frustrated so many centuries of readers because he refuses to acknowledge that his elegy contains any element of fiction. Instead, he insists repeatedly that it is we who err in our perception of the world. It is not enough to accept that Donne’s portrait of the world’s vanished soul represents the obscure Elizabeth Drury. To

96 Lewalski, Donne’s Anniversaries and the Poetry of Praise, 14.
97 James Andrew Clark, “The Plot of Donne’s Anniversaries,” Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900 30:1 (Winter 1990), 65. See also Zailig Pollock, “‘The Object, and the Wit’: The Smell of Donne’s ‘First Anniversary,’” English Literary Renaissance 13:3 (Autumn 1883), 301-318.
98 Lewalski, Donne’s Anniversaries and the Poetry of Praise, 41.
enter fully into the eerie thought experiment of the *Anniversaries*, we must accept that Elizabeth Drury *is* the world’s vanished soul, a leap that we have so far failed to make because, according to the speaker, we have “lost [our] sense and memory” (I.28). Here the speaker creates an infuriating tautology: the reason we lack the “sense and memory” to perceive Drury’s loss is precisely that she is dead. Bereft of the tools with which we are used to orienting ourselves within space and time, we must take the speaker’s word that the world has begun to disintegrate. But we do not want to take his word, because he is so unsympathetic. Instead of merely lamenting the ruin of his own world, he reaches out of his ontological realm into ours, insisting that our lived experience corresponds with his and that we have failed or refused to accept the correspondence. We observe the same phenomena and possess the same knowledge that he does, but our observations and knowledge are, he stresses, inadequate to the task of understanding Drury’s significance or the extent of the damage that our world has sustained in her absence. Our protestations that we see, hear, and remember perfectly well, that Drury was merely a fourteen-year-old girl, and that the world has not in fact fallen into chaos since her death, are nothing more than symptoms of our moral and intellectual ruin. The more we struggle against the illogic of the *Anniversaries*, the deeper we sink into its rhetorical quicksand. Our attempts to make sense of the poems only increase our confusion, and we begin indeed to question the authority of our “sense and memory.”

At the beginning of the *Progress*, the speaker exhorts us to “[d]o not so much as not believe a man” (II.52). He is referring to the people we encounter in the outside world, but he might as well be referring to himself:

Be not concerned; study not why nor when;  
Do not so much as not believe a man.  
For though to err be worst, to try truths forth  
Is far more business than this world is worth. (II.51-54)
The speaker continually pushes us to reject the evidence of our senses and we continually push back. Through this dialectic we reach the deep uncertainty necessary to comprehend Elizabeth Drury’s significance: “To be thus stupid is alacrity; / Men thus lethargic have best memory” (II.63-64). The best evidence for the *Anniversaries*’ claim that all worldly knowledge is fallacious is the *Anniversaries* themselves. Most poems reward close reading; the *Anniversaries* punish us for attempting it.

The speaker’s injunction to “do not so much as not believe a man” invokes the tradition of Pyrrhonian skepticism, which advocated “opposing evidence both pro and con on any question about what was non-evident, so that one would suspend judgment on the question.” Pyrrhonism gained popularity with counter-Reformation thinkers in sixteenth-century France and eventually spread to England: Joshua Scodel argues that Donne’s Satire 3 (“Kind pity chokes my spleen”) is “indebted to Sextus Empiricus’s contrast of Pyrrhonist searchers for truth with dogmatists and New Academicians who declare truth inapprehensible . . . as well as to Montaigne’s association of Pyrrhonism with the virtuous mean.” The *Anniversaries* seem equally indebted to Pyrrhonian thought, which, according to Richard Popkin, had by the early seventeenth century “overwhelmed man’s quest for certainty in both religious and scientific knowledge.”

Both Satire 3 and the *Anniversaries* suggest that Pyrrhonian skepticism is a necessary precondition for the discovery of religious truth. The speaker can complain that “new philosophy calls all in doubt” (I.205) because the state of mind that he attempts to instill in us is not total doubt but total abstraction from both belief and unbelief. Grounding our epistemology

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on the material world, as Baconian science sought to do, is useless when both our sight and the
phenomena we observe are in continual flux: “Next day repairs (but ill) next day’s decay. / Nor
are (although the river keep the name) / Yesterday’s waters and today’s the same” (II.394-396).

The speaker’s criticism of “new philosophy” may seem to anticipate the quarrel between
the so-called ancients and moderns later in the seventeenth century, but in fact he casts all forms
of worldly knowledge as equally fallacious, filtered as they are through “lattices of eyes” and
“labyrinths of ears” (II.296-297). Historical study is just as futile as astronomy or geography, for
Drury’s death has brought about the end of linear time and the detachment of cause from effect.
“Let thine own times as an old story be” (II.50), the speaker commands us in the Progress, and
by this he means not “remember” or “honor” but “forget.” The historical record has no practical
application in a world that has disintegrated into “fragmentary rubbidge” (I.82), and the usual
subjects of historical narratives—namely, the words and actions of public figures—have likewise
lost their import. In the Anniversaries, Elizabeth Drury is neither a symbol for something greater
nor a pretext for Donne’s “real” subject, but a deserving subject in herself, and deserving
precisely because of her obscurity and insignificance. It is difficult to accept that Drury merits
the treatment she receives in the Anniversaries, but it is also difficult to imagine who would. Has
any human being ever functioned as “general / steward to fate” (I.228-229), or the “intrinsic
balm” and “preservative” (I.57) of sublunary existence? Drury’s brief, uneventful life allows
Donne to alter the usual terms of historiography and write a history not of actions and words but
of being, potential, and private experience.

2. Measures of Time
As one would expect from a text with a temporal measurement in its very title, the *Anniversaries* are a series of meditations on time. As one might not expect from a text with such a title, the *Anniversaries* are also a series of meditations on the futility of measuring time. The poems present two parallel flows of time: the timeline of Donne’s and Robert Drury’s world, in which the speaker of the *Progress* can pledge “[y]early to bring forth such a child as this” (II.36), and the timeline of the post-Drury world, in which such calculations have no meaning:

Some months she hath been dead (but being dead,  
Measures of times are all determined)  
But long she’th been away, long, long, yet none  
Offers to tell us who it is that’s gone. (I.39-42)

In life, Drury was the supreme arbiter of measurement, “[s]he by whose lines proportion should be / Examined, measure of all symmetry” (I.309-210); in her absence, temporal measurement (and, indeed, all measurement) is “determined” or terminated.103 The four lines above enact as well as describe this phenomenon: we would expect the author of an elegy to know how long his subject has been dead, but Drury’s chief mourner can render no calculation more precise than “some months” and, two lines later, “long . . . long, long.” As other readers have noted, the phrase “long, long” contradicts “some months,” especially given the *Anatomy*’s orientation toward eternity. Louis L. Martz takes “long, long” and “some months” to be descriptions of two different periods of time, with one (the period between Drury’s death and the composition of the poem) symbolizing the other (the period between the fall of man or the angels and the composition of the poem).104 More meaning can be gained, however, by letting the contradiction

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stand. Drury has been gone both “some months” and “long, long”: such is the nature of temporality in the post-apocalyptic spacetime of the *Anniversaries*.

Donne returns to this contradiction in the opening lines of the *Progress*, acknowledging that though “a year is run / Since both this lower world’s and the sun’s sun . . . Did set” (II.3-6), the world somehow carries on and Donne himself is alive to write of it. This is an awkward problem, and Donne offers an equally awkward explanation: “there is motion in corruption” (II.22). Though deprived of its soul, the world continues to move, like a “beheaded man” (II.9) whose limbs and eyes still twitch. Most deceptive of all is the apparent passage of time:

As some days are at the Creation named
Before the sun, the which framed days, was framed,
So after this sun’s death some show appears,
And orderly vicissitude of years. (II.23-26)

Donne uses “vicissitude” in the now-obsolete sense of “[a]lternation, mutual or reciprocal succession, of things or conditions.” ¹⁰⁵ Here the parallel flows of time converge: it may seem that a year has elapsed since Drury’s death, but what we experience as secular time—the “orderly vicissitude of years”—is something else entirely. Yet there is no discernible difference—except, apparently, to the speaker—between pre- and post-apocalyptic time. Its fundamental nature has altered, but our senses prevent us from comprehending the extent of the alteration. Time is now undead: what we measure in years, and what our technology measures in hours and minutes, is merely its corpse. The fulfillment we find in the act of measurement derives more from our own intellectual vanity than from any real knowledge we can gain from our calculations.

Given the futility of measurement in our dissolving world, the poems’ keen interest in the accuracy of clocks seems odd, even perverse. In the *Anatomy*, Donne uses a decidedly unbiblical

image to lament the decline of man’s lifespan since biblical times: “Alas, we scarce live long enough to try / Whether a new-made clock run right or lie” (I.129-130). What does it mean for a clock to “run right” in a world where, as we learned earlier in the same poem, “measures of times are all determined”? If temporal measurement is futile and what we experience as time is mere “show,” what is the clock “new-made” to measure? This perplexity deepens in the *Funeral Elegy*, in which Drury herself becomes a timepiece:

> But must we say she’s dead? May’t not be said
> That as a sundered clock is piecemeal laid,
> Not to be lost, but by the maker’s hand
> Repolish’d, without error then to stand . . .
> May’t not be said, that her grave shall restore
> Her, greater, purer, firmer, then before? (FE 37-46)

This passage suggests that the clock that is Drury will be reassembled after the general resurrection, that is, after the end of time. But the sole purpose of a clock is to measure time; Drury will operate “without error” in a timespace that renders the accuracy of clocks irrelevant. Throughout the *Anniversaries*, measurement stands opposed to duration.

This opposition was not confined to the world of the *Anniversaries*. The concept of time in early-seventeenth-century England was defined by two conflicting desires: the scientific desire for accurate temporal measurement and the religious desire for the end of time itself. Donne had come of age in a period when, according to Richard Bauckham, “[t]he conviction of living close to the very end of the temporal process was widespread among Protestants.” 106 Among believers confident of their eventual reception into heaven, the end of time was more desired than feared, and they pinned their millennial hopes on a succession of monarchs and monarchs-to-be. After the death of Elizabeth I in 1603, the poet Robert Pricket welcomed James I to England with a

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treatise urging him to “bring to passe, the prophecies against the Citie of Rome,” for “this relying age is leaning to the latter ende of time, and all the signes forerunning the day of judgement, haue put themselues into a perfect view . . .” When the scholarly James proved unlikely to wage war against the Antichrist, Protestants transferred their hopes to his son Henry, whose death in late 1612, shortly after the publication of the *Anniversaries*, dealt yet another blow to English apocalyptic fervor. Even as the age generated more accurate ways of measuring time, one of its most popular religious traditions emphasized the end of time.

A great deal of the *Anniversaries*’ strangeness comes from its radical reworking of this tradition. Protestant apocalyptic chronology placed the modern era between the lost Golden Age and the millennium, which would bring about the overthrow of the Antichrist, the end of time, and the eternal reign of Christ. In the *Anniversaries*, however, the lifetime of Elizabeth Drury constituted, or at least partially resurrected, the Golden Age: “in all she did, / Some figure of the golden time was hid (II.69-70)” Now the world has lost “the form that made it live” (72), but there is no Christ in sight. Natural phenomena that we would interpret as ordinary become signs of universal disaster:

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But keeps the earth her round proportion still?
Doth not a Teneriffe or higher hill
Rise so high like a rock that one might think
The floating Moon would shipwreck there and sink?
Seas are so deep that whales being struck today
Perchance tomorrow scarce at middle way
Of their wished journey’s end, the bottom, die (I.285-291)
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We might protest that the earth has never been perfectly smooth and the seas have never been shallow, despite the speaker’s efforts to present these phenomena as symptoms of the world’s

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107 Robert Pricket, *Vnto the most high and mightie prince, his soueraigne lord King Iames. A poore subiect sendeth, a souldiers resolution; humbly to waite vpon his Maiestie In this little booke the godly vertues of our mighty King are specified, with disscription of our late Queene, (and still renowned) Elizas gouernement . . .* (London: printed by John Windet for Walter Burre, 1603).
dissolution. Our task, however, is to view them as aberrations from a normalcy that, according to
the geographical and historical records with which we are familiar, never existed. The speaker
continually endeavors to render the normal strange, unpredictable, even monstrous: hence such
images as “[t]he floating Moon,” which dispenses with the notion of orbit. He aims to make us
feel the destruction of the world so deeply that we lose the desire to go to the window for
confirmation. Only when we absorb the Anniversaries’ reactionary lesson, rejecting the
testimonies of natural history and personal experience, can we comprehend the gravity of the
disaster.

The Anniversaries engage with two separate, though related, theories current in the early
seventeenth century: first, that the apocalypse and the return of Christ were imminent; second,
that the fall of man had inaugurated a steady process of decay in nature and humanity. Donne
employs the former theory in two distinct ways, both unorthodox: as a metaphor and as a fait
accompli. “Well died the world, that we might live to see / This world of wit, in his anatomy,”
writes Joseph Hall in the first two lines of his commendatory poem on the Anniversaries. In
Hall’s formulation, the death of the world seems metaphorical, and according to one of Donne’s
timelines, in which the anniversary of Drury’s death marks the real passage of a year, the end of
time is indeed a metaphor. But what of the poems’ second timeline, in which the world was
“[n]othing but she, and her thou hast overpast” (I.31-32)? In his Divine Weeks and Works,
Guillaume Du Bartas upbraids those who attempt to predict the day of judgment through
“Ephemerides,” “Arithmetike,” and “Counters,” when the knowledge of the end of time belongs
only to God:

    Hee in his hand the sacred book doth bear
    Of that close-clasped finall Calender,
    Where, in Red letters (not with vs frequented)
    The certaine Date of that Great Day is printed;
That dreadfull Day, which doth so swiftly post,
That 'twil be seen, before fore-seen of most.\textsuperscript{108}

Donne blithely flouts this injunction, not by predicting the exact date of “[t]hat dreadfull Day” but by placing it in the past.

Donne’s version of the theory of universal decay is more orthodox. Many early modern Christians believed that mankind had declined continually in size, lifespan, and intelligence since his ancient glory. In the \textit{Anatomy}, Donne provides a helpful précis for this tradition:

For before God had made up all the rest
Corruption entered and depraved the best . . .
So did the world from the first hour decay,
That evening was beginning of the day;
And now the springs and summers which we see
Like sons of women after fifty be . . . (I.193-204)

The decline of man mirrors the decline of nature. People no longer live for centuries, as they did in the Old Testament: “Where is that mankind now? Who lives to age / Fit to be made Methusalem his page?” (I.127-128). Before the late sixteenth century, writes Victor Harris, the doctrine of decay “was not always distinguishable from the belief in the Fall of man and God’s subsequent curse upon the earth. But in the 1570’s and 1580’s there grew up a more explicit concern over the progressive or cumulative corruption, over the decay that did not stop with the original supernatural curse.”\textsuperscript{109} Proponents of this theory believed that the earth, like its inhabitants, deteriorated from year to year, and that natural disasters like earthquakes and floods provided evidence of nature’s decline and the imminent apocalypse. In England, the obsession with the decay of nature reached its height in the first three decades of the seventeenth century, becoming so widespread that Victor Harris calls it “the traditional historical perspective of the

\textsuperscript{109} Victor Harris, \textit{All Coherence Gone: A Study of the Seventeenth Century Controversy over Disorder and Decay in the Universe} (London: Frank Cass, 1949), 3-4.
age.”

Though this may be an overstatement—Achsah Guibbory makes a convincing case for the idea of historical cycles as “the dominant theory of history in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries”—there is no denying that the idea of universal decay had a tremendous influence on early modern intellectual culture. It might be useful here to distinguish temporal from historical thought. If humanist historians favored the idea that human nature was constant and historical actions unfolded in predictable cycles, theorists of time, including religious and literary thinkers like Donne, were attracted to the idea of continual decay.

Donne is unusual, however, in associating man’s physical and intellectual decline with modern scientific innovation. Like many aspects of the *Anniversaries*, this association is somewhat tautological. Donne claims not only that natural philosophy would be more effective if we lived as long as we used to live, but also that natural philosophy is a symptom of universal decay, which prevents us from living as long as we used to live. Our life expectancy has declined so dramatically since the beginning of the world that our astronomical observations are inadequate to the activity of the heavens. Investigations that demand generations of work in the seventeenth century might have been accomplished by one person in the Golden Age,

> When, if a slow-paced star had stol’n away  
> From the observer’s marking, he might stay  
> Two or three hundred years to see’t again,  
> And then make up his observation plain . . . (I.117-120)

But men in the Golden Age never conducted such observations, since their own world sufficed for their intellectual needs:

> And freely men confesse that this world's spent,  
> When in the Planets, and the Firmament  
> They seeke so many new; they see that this  
> Is crumbled out again to his atomies. (I.209-212)

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In a premodern world, our scientific research would be more accurate, but the condition of premodernity would liberate us from the need to pursue such research. Our intellectual curiosity signifies nothing more than our corruption.

In the *Anniversaries*, this principle applies not only to scientific projects spanning generations, but also to the more mundane work of perceiving and calculating time as it passes. Timepieces, specifically their potential for failure, preoccupied Donne throughout his poetic career. From the useless “sundial in a grave” in “The Will” (c. 1592-8) to the dysfunctional steeple clocks and pocket watches in “Obsequies to the Lord Harrington” (1614), Donne’s timepieces are rarely useful or accurate. In fact, they often serve to emphasize the impossibility, or at least futility, of accurate chronometry. Theresa M. DiPasquale reads the “Obsequies” as a critique of “the technological progressivism enthusiastically embraced at Prince Henry’s court”:

Donne casts the late John Harington, a young patron of the sciences, as “the only really accurate timepiece, the ‘greate Sunn-dyall’ that might ‘haue sett vs all,’ making it possible for the rest of humanity to keep correct time: that is, to achieve goodness.” Tellingly, Donne makes Harington not a mechanical device but a sundial, which he represents as more accurate than “small pocket-clocks, whose every wheel / Doth each mismotion and distemper feel, / Whose hands get shaking palsies” (131-133). Until the introduction of the balance spring in the 1670s, pocket watches were indeed inaccurate, valued primarily as ornaments and status symbols. Donne, like other seventeenth-century writers, doubts the power of clocks and watches to help their owners spend their time wisely. His criticisms of chronometric technology in the

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“Obsequies” and the *Anniversaries*, published just two years apart, are microcosmic representations of his more general skepticism toward the “new philosophy.”

In the *Anniversaries*, however, Donne’s critique of modern temporality goes deeper. Donne’s portrayal of Harington as a chronometric standard resembles his portrayal of Elizabeth Drury, after whose death “measures of time are all determined,” but with a crucial difference: the world of the *Anniversaries* lacks a natural standard of temporal measurement. The sundial metaphors in the “Obsequies” and “The Will” posit the sun as the ultimate arbiter of correct time, but in the *Anniversaries*, nature too is unreliable: the “orderly vicissitude of years” that opens the *Progress* is an illusion detached from a regular flow of time. The sun rises and sets as it always has, but what it marks by its rising and setting is not time but something else, and it is that something else that our timepieces measure. We *inhabit* undead time but *experience* time as we have always known it, and the poem is our only authority for the discrepancy between the two. In the “Obsequies,” timepieces are untrustworthy; in the *Anniversaries*, time itself is untrustworthy.

Indeed, the most significant temporal controversy in Donne’s lifetime concerned not technology but the ordering of time itself. The calendrical reforms introduced by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582 put England temporally at odds with most of the Continent, and the discrepancy was not resolved until more than a century after Donne’s death. The Julian calendar, instituted by the Council of Nicaea in 325, “was eleven minutes a year too long, and by the sixteenth century the error had accumulated to ten days.”¹¹³ By the end of the sixteenth century, English almanacs and chronologies had to take into account “the olde Iulian computation, which we vse, and the

Gregorian reformation vsed in forraigne countreyes.”¹¹⁴ The first writer to use the double calculation was William Farmer, whose 1587 almanac for Dublin provided an alternate timetable for “whosoever that hath cause to travel, trade, or traffique into any Nation which hath already received this new Kalender.”¹¹⁵ England’s method of computing the passage of time had itself become “olde” and outmoded, yet adopting the Gregorian calendar struck many Protestants as tantamount to reacknowledging the authority of Rome. Elizabeth I’s court astrologer John Dee wrote a treatise recommending that England adopt a modified version of the Gregorian calendar, and though his arguments convinced Elizabeth’s privy council, her bishops refused to accept any version of a calendar that had been promulgated by a papal bull. They also feared that switching to Gregorian measurement would cause a rift with Protestant nations that remained on the Julian calendar.¹¹⁶ Despite attempts throughout the seventeenth century to close the temporal divide between England and Catholic Europe, the Gregorian calendar was not officially adopted in England until 1752, and not without significant opposition.¹¹⁷

Donne himself portrayed the Gregorian calendar as a frivolous Jesuit innovation in Ignatius his Conclave, written in the same year as the Anatomy. Ignatius attacks James I’s intellectual bugbears, the Jesuits, by way of a dream vision set in an exalted corner of hell: “a secret place, where there were not many, beside Lucifer himselfe; to which, onely they had title, which had so attempted any inovation in this life, that they gaue an affront to all antiquitie, and

¹¹⁴ Gabriel Frende, A doble almanacke, with a prognostication for the yeare of our redemption M.D.XCV. And from the worldes creation. 5557. Conteyning the olde Iulian computation, which we vse, and the Gregorian reformation vsed in forraigne countreyes (London: printed by Richard Watkins and James Roberts, 1595).
¹¹⁶ See the chapter entitled “John Dee and the Elizabethan Calendar” in Robert Poole, Time’s Alteration: Calendar Reform in Early Modern England (London: UCL Press, 1998), 57-69.
¹¹⁷ Lord Chesterfield’s bill in favor of the Gregorian calendar was debated in Parliament in March 1751. By 1752, the discrepancy between the Julian and Gregorian calendars had reached eleven days, triggering protests from laborers worried about losing eleven days of pay. See Poole, “Give Us Our Eleven Days!,” 104, 112.
induced doubts, and anxieties, and scruples, and after, a libertie of beleueing what they would; at
length established opinions, directly contrary to all established before” (6). In this stygian
academy Lucifer sits in judgment with Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order, as his
adviser. Copernicus, Paracelsus, and Machiavelli jockey for a place in the room, each man
insisting that he has invented the form of knowledge most detrimental to human advancement.
To each plea Ignatius opposes a speech proving that the Jesuits have outdone all other useless
innovators. At last Lucifer, beginning to fear his right-hand man’s ambition, banishes Ignatius
and all the Jesuits to a new hell on the moon, where they may “easily vnite and reconcile the
Lunatique Church to the Romane Church” (118).

Donne’s Ignatius extols the German Jesuit Christopher Clavius (1538-1612), who
expanded and defended the original formulation of the Gregorian calendar, as a promulgator of
useless knowledge: “contentions, and schoole-combats” for whose sake “more necessarie matters
bee neglected” (19). Ignatius advances Clavius as a candidate for the highest academic honors of
hell after Satan has heard the plea of Copernicus, whom Ignatius considers unfit because his
arguments for heliocentrism “may very well be true” (19). According to Ignatius, Clavius
deserves honor not only for opposing Copernicus’ scientific findings, but also

for the great paines . . . which hee tooke in the Gregorian Calender, by which both the
peace of the Church, & Ciuill businesses haue beene egregiously troubled: nor hath
heauen it selfe escaped his violence, but hath euer since obeyed his apointments: so that S.
Stephen, John Baptist, & all the rest, which haue bin commanded to worke miracles at
certain appointed daies, where their Reliques are preserued, do not now attend till the day
come, as they were accustomed, but are awaked ten daies sooner, and constrained by him
to come downe from heauen to do that businesse . . . (19-20)

For Donne, meddling with the calculation of secular time is the very definition of time-wasting.

Ignatius his Conclave renders the saints as harried clerks roused from their heavenly slumber to

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118 John Donne, Ignatius his conclave or his inthronisation in a late election in hell: wherein many things are mingled by way of satyr; concerning the disposition of Jesuists, the creation of a new hell, the establishing of a church in the moone (London: printed by Nicholas Okes, for Richard More, 1611).
obey an earthly bureaucracy. “Donne plays the Gregorian Calendar for laughs,” writes Anne Lake Prescott, “but . . . the issue is real, for the Protestant convert here performs another conversion, changing, through parody, a liturgical and Catholic understanding of saints into something more sceptical of the ‘Stephen-ness’ of St Stephen’s Day (26 December), its quidditas.” But Donne’s criticism falls more heavily on the Gregorian calendar than on the practice of honoring relics and saints’ days. The principal object of Donne’s mockery in Ignatius his Conclave is not Catholicism in general but what Donne sees as the specifically Jesuit habit of encouraging overzealous scholastic inquiries. Indeed, criticism of the calendar switch was not limited to English writers or Protestants. In his essay “Of the Lame or Cripple,” Donne’s fellow Pyrrhonian Montaigne attacks the innovation:

Two or three yeares are now past, since the yeere hath beene shortned tenne dayes in France. Oh how many changes are like to ensue this reformation! It was a right remooving of Heaven and Earth together, yet nothing remooveth from it’s owne place: My Neighbours finde the season of their seede and Harvest time, the opportunity of their affaires, their lucky and vnlucky dayes, to answer just those seasons to which they had from all ages assigned them. Neither was the errour heeretofore perceived, nor is the reformation now discerned in our vse.

In Montaigne’s view, the calendrical reforms are unnecessary because they have no connection to temporal experience. Whatever Pope Gregory is tampering with, it is not time as perceived by human beings in the world.

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119 Prescott, “Refusing Translation,” 7. Prescott also notes that two of Donne’s shorter poems, “A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies Day, Being the Shortest Day” and “Upon the Annunciation and Passion Falling upon One Day,” “depend upon not translating the Gregorian Calendar” (8).

120 Abolishing holy days was primarily a Puritan concern: see Poole, Time’s Alteration, 74.

Shades of *Ignatius his Conclave* appear throughout the *Anniversaries*, particularly in the *Progress*, which describes the soul’s journey to heaven. Released at last from embodied time, the soul “dispatches in a minute all the way / ’Twixt Heav’n and Earth; she stays not in the air / To look what meteors there themselves prepare” (II.188-190). Her lack of astronomical curiosity is the direct result of her liberation from earthly time: “But ere she can consider how she went, / At once is at and through the firmament” (II.205-206). One of the wonders she passes is the site of Ignatius’s new hell: “She baits not at the Moon, nor cares to try / Whether in that new world men live and die” (II.195-196). In *Ignatius*, the person who “cares to try” those possibilities is “Galilaeo the Florentine,” who, according to Lucifer, “by this time hath throughly instructed himselfe of all the hills, woods, and Cities in the new world, the Moone” (117). Lucifer assures Ignatius that he and the other Jesuits, “with the same ease as you passe from the earth to the Moone . . . may passe from the Moone to the other starrs, which are also thought to be worlds, & so you may beget and propagate many Hells, & enlarge your Empire” (118). The soul lacks the curiosity of Galileo, but her journey between the spheres mirrors the projected journey of the Jesuits between new hells, and we might well ask why Donne chose to transfer this image almost wholesale between a scurrilous anti-Jesuit satire and an apparently high-minded meditation on the soul’s progress toward heaven.

The answer lies in the temporal structure of the *Anniversaries* themselves. “To paraphrase one of Donne’s own images: the *Anniversaries* like adamant have drawn random pieces of iron from his previous work,” writes Richard Hughes. Scholars have largely dispensed with the notion that the poems constitute a Jesuit meditation in which “[t]he religious motifs in Petrarchan lament . . . have combined with strictly religious meditation to produce a

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123 Hughes, “The Woman in Donne’s *Anniversaries*,” 308.
poem which by its form demands to be considered as fundamentally a spiritual exercise.”

However, the jarring contrast between the _Anniversaries_’ style (or styles) and its stated purpose continues to perplex. According to Martz, the satirical parts of the _Anatomy_ “might be seen as enacting a failure in the meditative process.” Despite the speaker’s best efforts, “the power of the eulogy is eroded by the power of satire; the image of virtue cannot control the world’s corruption, cannot avert the direction of the poem toward the grave.” This interpretation is equally applicable to the _Progress_. Over and over, the speaker exhorts us to “think” on death, the decay of the body, and the departure of the soul; but we cannot contemplate heavenly matters except from our position in the fallen world, a paradox of which Donne is well aware. The poems enact this paradox by returning repeatedly to Donne’s earlier themes and personae. Precisely at the moment when the soul escapes earthly time, we are thrust back into the satirical morass of _Ignatius his Conclave_. The more we “think” on the celestial temporality of the soul, the more deeply aware we become of our own ruin. Tayler argues that “[t]he shift of emphasis, from ‘Anatomy’ and _contemptus mundi_ to ‘Progres of the Soule’ and _contemplatio dei_, is entirely traditional.”

DiPasquale argues that the soul’s experience of time in the _Progress_ resembles the scholastic concept of “aeviternity,” or “the atemporal state of angels and disembodied souls. . . . Indeed, many of Donne’s human clocks and dials may be termed aeviternometers rather than

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125 Martz, “Donne’s Anniversaries Revisited,” 56.

126 Tayler, _Donne’s Idea of a Woman_, 100.
chronometers, for they mark not only the intervals of time as it is ordinarily understood but the ages of aeviternity as time transfigured.”127 But throughout his meditation on death and the soul, the speaker refuses to draw a clear distinction between secular time and what DiPasquale and Aquinas (though not Donne) describe as “aeviternity.” The two forms of time are hopelessly commingled. Donne uses several earthly temporal markers to orient (or disorient) us: “Forget this world, and scarce think of it so, / As of old clothes cast off a year ago” (II.61-62); “Think that they bury thee, and think that rite; / Lays thee to sleep but a St Lucy’s night” (119-120); and, as we have already seen, “think this slow-paced soul . . . Dispatches in a minute all the way / ’Twixt Heav’n and Earth” (185-189). What does “a minute” or “but a St. Lucy’s night” mean in the context of the soul’s progress? Since we are living after the fall of both man post-Eden and the world post-Drury, what we think of as “a minute” no longer bears any real correspondence to time. We end the Anniversaries uncertain of the meaning of the very title. Absent a stable standard, the temporal markers and measurements that appear throughout the Anniversaries collapse into one another: “some months,” “long, long,” “the first hour” (I.201), “the first week” (I.347), “too long an ecstasy” (FE 82), “[n]ext day repairs (but ill) last day’s decay” (II.394-395), “my second year’s true rent” (II.520). Given Donne’s ambivalent fascination with timepieces, it is fitting that his vision of an utterly fallen world is one in which time cannot be measured at all.

III. Fit for Chronicle

In the closing lines of the Anatomy, the speaker speculates that readers might disapprove of his choice of subject, thinking Elizabeth Drury’s virtues “matter fit for chronicle not verse” (I.460). In response, he reminds potential critics that his decision has a divine precedent: God

composed the Song of Moses because he knew that the Israelites “would let fall / The Law, the Prophets, and the History, / But keep the song still in their memory” (464-466). At first glance, this argument seems both clear and conventional: a poem is more memorable than a prose “chronicle,” and Donne wishes to prevent his readers from “let[ting] fall” Elizabeth Drury’s memory. But the very last couplet complicates this conclusion: “Verse hath a middle nature: Heaven keeps souls, / The grave keeps bodies, verse the fame enrolls” (473-474). Donne’s claim for “a middle nature” could apply equally well to any kind of commemorative writing: not just verse but also “chronicle.” There is a suggestion here that Drury is in fact not fit for chronicle, and that Donne’s decision to write a poem instead of a history has less to do with the reader’s faulty memory than with Drury’s particular nature.

Donne was correct in predicting, disingenuously or not, that his poem would be ill-received by some readers. The reason for its mixed reception, however, was quite different from the one he anticipated. Readers objected not to Donne’s decision to “imprison” (I.470) Drury in verse instead of chronicle, but to his decision to commemorate her at all. As we have seen, centuries of scholars have debated Drury’s “fit[ness]” for the Anniversaries: she does not strike many readers as an appropriate subject for elegy or history. And it is Donne himself who leads us to conflate the two categories. If he presented the Anatomy as only a series of poems, his elegiac hyperbole might be easier to accept. But his allusion to Deuteronomy 31 implies that just as the Song of Moses is a poetic version of “the Laws, the Prophets, and the History,” so the Song of Drury is a poetic version of the “chronicle” that Donne would otherwise write. By mentioning “History” and “chronicle” at all, he succeeds not in differentiating the Anatomy from

128 See Deuteronomy 31:19-20: “Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach it the children of Israel: put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel. For when I shall have brought them into the land which I sware to their fathers . . . then will they turn unto other gods, and serve them, and provoke me, and break my covenant.”
those generic categories but in making us think about them in relation to his poem. We come away from the *Anatomy* reflecting on Drury as both an elegiac subject and, potentially, a historical subject.

This move comes as a surprise, given that the speaker has already done everything in his power to confound our own sense of orientation within time. In the first lines of the *Anatomy*, we learn that in outliving Drury, the world has somehow outlived itself: “thou wast / Nothing but she, and her thou hast overpast” (I.31-32). As the world, so its individual inhabitants: “We are born ruinous” (I.95). The sense that we have “overpast” ourselves, have arrived irremediably tardy to some great event, lingers throughout the poems. One is reminded of Queen Elizabeth’s attack on Richard in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*: “Swear not by time to come; for that thou hast / Misused ere used, by time misused o’erpast” (IV.4.398-399). Andrew Escobedo argues that a “sense of belatedness” and of “isolation from origins” was a defining feature of early modern English national consciousness; it is, certainly, a defining feature of the ethos of the *Anniversaries*.¹²⁹ Again and again, we learn too late what we have missed, ignored, forgotten. The speaker urges us to view even ordinary natural phenomena through the lens of “overpassing”: “And now the springs and summers that we see / Like sons of women after fifty be” (I.203). Like Drury, the larger world is simultaneously dead and alive:

> For there’s a kind of world remaining still;  
> Though shee which did inanimate and fill  
> The world be gone, yet in this last long night,  
> Her ghost doth walk . . . (I.67-70)

Not a world but “a kind of world,” not time but its “show”: every abstraction has its simulacrum, and we are too late for anything but the simulacra.

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As past, present, and future continue to collapse into one another, we become conscious that the *Anniversaries* lack not only a standard of temporal measurement but also a stable sense of their own history. The more closely we consider the time scheme of this fictional universe, the more questions arise: If the world was “nothing but [Drury],” and she was “not fifteen” (FE 86) when she died, what existed before her birth? How can the world be said to have decayed both “from the first hour” (I.201) and from the moment of Drury’s death? How can Drury be both “a new compass” for “men / [who] Did in their voyage in this world’s sea stray” (I.224-226) and, in the very next lines, “best and first original / Of all fair copies” (I.227-228): that is, both “new” to the world and its “original”? The speaker does not even make clear whether the world has ended for good or simply gone on hiatus. We are, after all, alive to read the poems—or so we think.

Even if we are alive, we cannot rely on the memories we have formed in the course of our lives. Our experiences, based as they are on sensory impressions, merely hinder us from navigating the undead world of the *Anniversaries*. In the *Anatomy*, as we have seen, the speaker laments that the world has “lost [its] sense and memory” (I.28). In the *Progress*, however, he enjoins us to consign the present to oblivion: “Forget this rotten world, and unto thee / Let thine own times as an old story be” (II.49-50). This would seem to be yet another internal contradiction of the *Anniversaries*: how can the speaker mourn our loss of memory and adjure us to forget everything we have not yet forgotten? But the memory whose disappearance he laments in the *Anatomy* has little to do with the memory he orders us to abandon in the *Progress*. The second kind of memory allows us to situate ourselves in our “rotten world”: it is founded in the senses, and is therefore useless. The first kind of memory is altogether different: it is the “memory” we *should* have, but do not have, of Elizabeth Drury’s universal influence during her
time on earth. To participate in the logic of the *Anniversaries*, we must both abandon our real memories and accept as truth a memory we do not actually possess. D. R. Woolf argues that “writing achieved during the early modern era that authenticity as a medium for the past which it now enjoys, whereby document is privileged over tradition, text over memory, record over oral anecdote.”¹³⁰ The *Anniversaries* is the most drastic extension of this principle, a *reductio ad absurdum* of the triumph of textual culture. If we strip away our recollections of the “rotten world,” what remains in our heads, the speaker suggests, is the memory of Elizabeth Drury. This is the memory—not of the past but, perhaps, of the “overpast”—on which Donne erects the historical structure of the *Anniversaries*.

The *Anniversaries* are decidedly anti-historical poems, resisting the facts of the past at every turn. Donne invokes two versions of historical writing, “chronicle” and “history,” only to dismiss them as inadequate to his project. Tayler assumes that the phrase “chronicle not verse” refers to a “[saintly] Chronicle,” but Donne seems to me to be thinking not of hagiography but of chronology.¹³¹ In the early modern period, the most popular sense of the word “chronicle” was “[a] detailed and continuous register of facts in order of time; a historical record, *esp.* one in which the facts are narrated without philosophic treatment, or any attempt at literary style.”¹³² By the turn of the seventeenth century, this genre was more or less outmoded; Donne himself had scoffed at it in Satire IV (“Well, I may now receive and die”), written in 1597.¹³³ The speaker of the satire encounters a court sycophant who relates

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¹³³ *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, ed. Robbins, 397. Robbins believes that Donne wrote Satire IV in 1597, due to his mention of two events in that year: the loss of Amiens to the Spanish and the closing of the playhouse in Shoreditch. However, Donne’s reference to Stow makes me suspect that the satire may have been written a year later, just after the publication of Stow’s *Survey of London*—not his first book, but by far his most popular.
many a lie,
More than ten Holinsheds and Halls and Stows,
Of trivial household trash he knows: he knows
When the Queen smiled or frowned, and he knows what
A subtle statesman may gather of that . . . (96-100)

Donne refers here to three sixteenth-century English chroniclers: Raphael Holinshed (1529-1580), Edward Hall (1497-1547), and John Stow (c. 1525-1605). While Holinshed and Hall chronicled, respectively, ancient British history and the Wars of the Roses, Stow’s *Survey of London* (1598) spans “the originall, antiquity, increase, moderne estate, and description of that citie.” Stow is fond of noting material details of the city without connecting them to a larger narrative (e.g. “This house is now all in ruine, and letten out in seuerall Tenements, yet the armes of the Lord Barkley remaaine in the stone worke of an arched gate, and is betwéene a Cheuron crosses, 10. three, three, and foure”). Compared to humanist history, which drew morals and abstractions from the past, the unincorporated factual matter of chronicles might indeed have struck the young Donne as comparable to the “trivial household trash” of a London rumormonger.

In Satire IV, “the man who keeps the [Westminster] Abbey tombs, / And for his price, doth with whoever comes / Of all our Harries and our Edwards talk” (76-78) is merely annoying; in the *Anniversaries*, such intellectual folly becomes spiritually dangerous:

> And yet one watches, starves, freezes, and sweats,
> To know but catechisms and alphabets
> Of unconcerning things, matters of fact:
> How others on our stage their parts did act;
> What Caesar did, yea, and what Cic’ro said. . . . (II.283-287)

“Their parts” implies a certain falseness: what Caesar did is not what Caesar was; what Cicero said is not what Cicero was. The “matters of fact” that make up the historical record are not

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matters of ontology, and it is ontology—Elizabeth Drury’s ontological status in particular—with which the *Anniversaries* are concerned. From the *Anatomy*’s refrain of “She, she is dead; she’s dead,” to the *Funeral Elegy*’s claim that “to scape th'infirmities which wait upon / Woman, she went away before sh’was one” (FE 78-79), to the speculation in the *Progress* that “she rather was two souls, / Or like to full, on-both-sides-written rolls” (II.503-504), the *Anniversaries* dwell upon the states of being that Drury inhabited, improved, or rejected. An entire critical tradition has grown up around the idea that the poems have nothing to do with Elizabeth Drury, yet the *Anniversaries* dwell obsessively on what she was and, perhaps more importantly, was not.

Despite Donne’s refusal to provide stable temporal markers for the reader, the *Anniversaries* also constitute a chronology of sorts, a negative image of the genre. Many chronologies attempted an account of time from creation to apocalypse: Holinshed’s *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, for instance, was originally intended as one installment of a multi-author “vniuersall Cosmographie of the whole worlde.” Likewise, the *Anniversaries* provide a history of the world (or, at least, a world), but from the perspective of one who has outlived or “overpast” it. Chronicles record names, dates, and places; the *Anniversaries* record states of being (Elizabeth Drury is never even mentioned by name). In *Metempsychosis*, which purports to be a history of “th’great world to his aged evening / From infant morn to manly noon” (5-6), Donne crafted a wry homage to the declining genre of the chronicle. The *Anniversaries* pick up where *Metempsychosis* leaves off, extending Donne’s satirical chronology past the end of the world. Drury turns out to be “fit for chronicle,” but for an unorthodox kind of chronicle, one that inverts almost every convention of the genre.

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The *Anniversaries* comprise not only a negative-image chronicle, but also a negative-image history. In the poems, Donne distances himself from what I have been calling “humanist history”: the form of historical writing that originated in the earlier Renaissance with historians like Niccolò Machiavelli and Polydore Vergil, and that by the early seventeenth century had largely supplanted the chronicle in England. The *Funeral Elegy* proposes that one of the fundamental acts of historical imagination—discerning cause and effect, or “measuring future things from things before” (FE 87)—is now impossible: “‘Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone; / All just supply, and all relation” (I.213-214). Accordingly, there is no meaningful or predictable “relation” between Drury’s potential and her fate:

He which, not knowing her sad history,  
Should come to read her Book of Destiny,  
How fair and chaste, humble and high she’d been,  
Much promised, much performed, at not fifteen,  
And, measuring future things from things before,  
Should turn the leaf to read, and read no more,  
Would think that either Destiny mistook,  
Or that some leaves were torn out of the Book. (FE 83-90)

This passage would seem to contradict the speaker’s previous suggestion that Drury was all potential and no action: apparently she performed “much” before her death. But what did she perform? The *Anniversaries* leave the answer unclear. In the allegorical sense, Drury acted as “the general / Steward to Fate” (I.228-229) and “caused all civil war to cease” (I.322); in the literal sense, she did nothing worthy of a traditional narrative of noteworthy events. History, like chronicle, becomes a matter not of action but of being.

The hallmark of humanist historiography is its insistence on the stability of human nature and, consequently, the immediate relevance of historical actions to modern circumstances. In the preface to his *Discourses on Livy* (1517), Machiavelli complains that readers view historical anecdotes as entertaining stories, to be...impossible of imitation, as if the heaven, the sun, the
elements and man had in their motion, their order, and their potency, become different from what they used to be.”\textsuperscript{136} By the late sixteenth century, however, the larger culture had adopted Machiavelli’s view of history as directly applicable to modern life, as in the “goal-orientated” reading process described by Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton.\textsuperscript{137} But Donne resists this impulse, attempting instead to break the thread of moral and intellectual authority linking the past to the present. His view of history in the Anniversaries recalls Montaigne’s in “Of the Lame or Cripple”:

Are not we then well holp-vp, to keepe a register of things past? I was even now plodding (as often I doe) vpon this, what free and gadding instrument humane reason is. I ordinarily see, that men, in matters proposed them, doe more willingly ammuze and busie themselves in seeking out the reasons, than in searching out the trueth of them. They omit presuppositions, but curiously examine consequences. They leave things, and runne to causes. Oh conceited discourses! The knowledge of causes doth onely concerne him, who hath the conduct of things: Not vs, that have but the sufferance of them.\textsuperscript{138}

By dismissing what Caesar did and Cicero said as irrelevant “matters of fact,” the speaker reduces those words and deeds to mere facts: there is no abstract significance to be drawn from the actions of great persons. The category of humanist history has been utterly vacated. But instead of abandoning that vacated category, Donne refills it with something that looks very much like history. In the literal sense, Elizabeth Drury did nothing worthy of a traditional narrative of noteworthy events; but instead of celebrating her character as character, Donne interprets Drury’s private impulses as political actions:

She who, being to herself a state, enjoyed
All royalties which any state employed;
For she made wars and triumphed: reason still
Did not o’erthrow but rectify her will;
And she made peace, for no peace is like this:
That beauty and chastity together kiss;

\textsuperscript{136} Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 99.
\textsuperscript{137} Jardine and Grafton, “Studied for Action’: How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy,” 30.
\textsuperscript{138} Montaigne, Essays vwritten in French by Michael Lord of Montaigne, 578.
She did high justice, for she crucified
Every first motion of rebellious pride;
And she gave pardons and was liberal:
For, only herself except, she pardon'd all[.] (II.359-368)

Drury accomplishes all the feats of a ruling monarch, but renders them internal, invisible, and almost entirely solitary. In anyone else, they might be lost to time; in Drury, however, they become the stuff of statehood: “As these prerogatives, being met in one, / Made her a sovereign state, religion / Made her a Church; and these two made her all” (II.373-375). Donne here inverts the traditional criteria by which an individual becomes a historical subject. The actions of a ruler—making war, enforcing laws, condemning criminals—become aspects of being.

Paradoxically, the speaker’s elevation of Drury to the status of monarch deprives her of individuality. He has already deplored his contemporaries’ desire to be thought *sui generis*: “For every man alone thinks that he hath got / To be a phoenix, and that there can be / None of that kind of which he is, than he” (I.216-218). A world that overvalues the knowledge that arises from individual experience cannot help but undervalue a universal soul “from whose influence all impressions came” (I.415). Accordingly, the speaker celebrates Drury for recoiling at her own imminent personhood and dying before she could become active in the world:

Fate did but usher her
To years of reason’s use, and then infer
Her destiny t’herself; which liberty
She took but for thus much: thus much to die.
Her liberty not suffer’ring her to be
Fellow-commissioner with Destiny,
She did no more but die. (FE 91-97)

Her modesty, in other words, prevented her from living out her potential, and she left that potential to us: at the end of the *Funeral Elegy*, the speaker enjoins us to “make up that book” (101) of Drury’s unfinished history. The text is, even at the material level, Elizabeth Drury herself. While alive, she was comparable to “full, on-both-sides-written rolls, / Where eyes might
read upon the outward skin” (II.504-505); now that she is dead, however, the Anniversaries are mere “rags of paper . . . Those carcass verses, whose soul is not she” (FE 11-14). Her soul dwells not in the poems that memorialize her, but in the reader as he moves forward into the post-apocalyptic “new world.”

4. To Lodge an Inmate Soul

The first word of the Anniversaries is, fittingly, a temporal one—“when”:

When that rich soul which to her heaven is gone,
Whom all they celebrate who know they’ve one
(For who is sure he hath a soul, unless
It see and judge and follow worthiness,
And by deeds praise it? He who doth not this,
May lodge an inmate soul, but ’tis not his) . . . (I.1-6)

But that “when,” like almost every temporal marker in the Anniversaries, is deceptive. The first six lines of the poem form a single clause ending nowhere, and a word that promises orientation within time abandons us mid-sentence. Each of the short clauses following “When that rich soul” begins with a pronoun that beckons us further from our path: “which,” “whom,” “who.” These six lines are followed by another “when” statement with its own offshoots: “When that queen ended here her progress’ time” (7). We do not rejoin “When that rich soul” and “When that queen” until line 11: “This world in that great earthquake languishèd . . .” When Elizabeth Drury’s soul left us for heaven, the world began to disintegrate: clear enough, if not immediately plausible, but what of the matter in the middle? Between the two halves of that thought lurks the casual suggestion, only tenuously connected to the grammatical subject of the sentence, that some people do not really have souls. The structure of the passage mirrors the idea: throughout the Anniversaries, we encounter “inmate souls” only tenuously connected to the bodies where they are lodged. In the seventeenth century, the word “inmate” carried a dual meaning: either
“[o]ne who is the mate or associate of another or others in the same dwelling; one who dwells with others in a house” or “[o]ne not originally or properly belonging to the place where he dwells; a foreigner, stranger.” The lines “He who doth not this, / May lodge an inmate soul, but ’tis not his” implies a separation between “he” and “soul”: the “inmate soul” is not an intrinsic part of this person’s selfhood, his “he”-ness. Something separates soul and self, just as Donne’s parentheses isolate his meditations on the nature of the soul. The phrase “inmate soul” is itself a grammatical inmate, within the sentence but not quite of it.

In this particular passage, the weak bond between soul and body, or soul and self, is to be lamented. Later in the Anniversaries, however, the speaker repeatedly proposes that we must allow Drury’s soul to penetrate us. I use the word “penetrate” advisedly, because Donne relentlessly sexualizes the soul’s habitation in the body. Later in the Anatomy, we learn that if Socrates, “who thought souls made / Of harmony,” had seen harmony embodied in Drury, he would have inferred “that souls were but resultances from her, / And did from her into our bodies go, / As to our eyes the forms from objects flow” (I.311-316). In the opening lines of the Progress, the imagery of penetration becomes more explicit as the speaker casts Drury as male and invites her to a “chaste” copulation: “though thou wouldst refuse / The name of Mother, be unto my Muse, / A Father, since her chaste ambition is / Yearly to bring forth such a child as this” (II.33-35). In life, however, Drury was herself penetrated by her own soul: “She whose fair body no such prison was / But that a soul might be content to pass / An age in her” (II.221-223). It is impossible not to read this bizarre image as innuendo, especially as the phrase “pass out” could refer either to orgasm or to the soul’s departure from the body. For Donne, though, passing

out is less interesting than passing in. Drury’s soul, having passed “an age” in her and passed out again, now seeks new habitation:

The twilight of her memory doth stay;  
Which, from the carcass of the old world free,  
Creates a new world, and new creatures be  
Produced. The matter and the stuff of this  
Her virtue, and the form our practice is . . . (I.74-78)

This formulation literalizes and sexualizes the reading process of humanist history, the reading “for action” described by Jardine and Grafton. Early modern historians present models of good and evil behavior, and the reader completes the process of historical narrative by rendering those models relevant to his own life and circumstances. In the preface to The First Part of the Historie of England, published in the same year as the Anniversaries, Samuel Daniel speculates that “God in his prouidence, to checke our presumption, wraps vp all things in vncertaintie, barres vs out from long antiquitie, and boundes our searches within the compasse of a few ages, as if the same were sufficient, both for example, and instruction, to the gouer[n]ment of men.”

Donne limits his historical compass even more strictly, presenting a single paragon of virtue whose qualities literally enter and inhabit our good works. In these lines, Drury is successively a ghost, a light, and “matter and stuff,” making a swift progression from intangible to tangible. Her intangible qualities become the raw material of a new world, to which our actions give “form.” For an individual’s soul to “see and judge and follow worthiness,” as in the first lines of the Anatomy, it must accept Elizabeth Drury’s soul as a companion. The world can survive its downfall only through a kind of metempsychosis in which Drury’s “ghost” (I.70) inhabits each of her survivors.

As a historical (or anti-historical) subject, Drury is male, female, and genderless; like the queen who shared her name, she is both sexualized and desexualized. In Meakin’s words, she is “Donne’s most complex rendering of the present absence of the feminine.”141 The Anniversaries’ governing conceit rests on the assumption that Drury either transcended or never arrived at womanhood: “To scape th’infirmities which wait upon / Woman, she went away before sh’was one” (FE 77-78). The Drury of the Anniversaries is simultaneously more and less than woman: more in spirit, less in years. The speaker holds a dismal opinion of women in general, lamenting that original sin “made woman, sent / For man’s relief, cause of his languishment” (I.101-102).

A conventionally misogynistic complaint follows:

[Women] were to good ends, and they are so still,
But accessory, and principal in ill.
For that first marriage was our funeral:
One woman at one blow then killed us all,
And singly, one by one, they kill us now.
We do delightfully ourselves allow
To that consumption, and, profusely blind,
We kill ourselves to propagate our kind. (I.103-110)

Drury, however, “went away,” a phrase that implies a certain agency, before she could perpetuate this “ill” within marriage. The Funeral Elegy makes clear that Drury would be less holy had she not escaped, “[c]lothed in her virgin white integrity,” from the traditional female chronology of marriage and sexuality: “For marriage, though it does not stain, doth dye” (FE 75-76). Not only did Drury never perform the deeds by which men became historical subjects in the early modern period; she also never performed the deeds by which women became subjects of conventional commemoration. In fact, Donne suggests that those deeds—namely, the actions accomplished within marriage and motherhood—are just as meaningless as “what Caesar did, yea, and what Cicero said.”

141 Meakin, John Donne’s Articulations of the Feminine, 203.
But if the speaker praises Drury’s ability to “drive / The pois’nous tincture and the stain of Eve / Out of her thoughts and deeds” (I.179-181), he also undercuts that praise by describing her in erotic and material terms. The word “rich” appears frequently in the Anatomy: Donne refers to Drury’s “rich soul” (I.1), her “rich eyes and breast” (I.229), and “those rich joys which did possess her heart” (I.433). In the Funeral Elegy, the richness becomes literal as Donne transfigures Drury into an ornate jewel: “Alas, what’s marble, jet, or porphyry, / Prized with the chrysolite of either eye, / Or with those pearls and rubies which she was?” (FE 3-5). In the Progress, we learn that her “rich beauty lent / Mintage to others’ beauties” (II.223-224). These baroque descriptions jar with the poems’ repeated insistence that Drury existed, and continues to exist, outside the sphere of sexual interest. Drury may have forsaken her flesh when she died, but the Anniversaries keep it alive by dwelling almost obsessively on “her materials” (FE 7).

Donne had attached the same imagery to a dead woman three years before, in his “Elegy upon the Death of Lady Markham,” which imagines her grave as “her limbeck, which refines / The diamonds, rubies, sapphires, pearls, and mines / Of which her flesh was” (23-25). Indeed, Donne seems to be rather shamelessly borrowing Lady Markham’s gems for his description of Elizabeth Drury’s “pearls and rubies.” But there is a crucial difference between the two metaphors. Donne casts Lady Markham as a jewel only to emphasize that her flesh will become even richer, become “such stuff as God” (27), at the resurrection; indeed, he echoes this sentiment in “An Elegy upon the Death of Mistress Bulstrode,” written just four months later: “Her soul is gone to usher up her corse, / Which shall be almost another soul, for there / Bodies are purer than best souls are here” (46-48). In contrast with these earlier elegies, the Funeral Elegy compares Drury’s “materials” favorably to other materials, and laments that his poem cannot capture their richness. The Anniversaries return over and over to the material aspects of
the past—that is, the details that most historians let fall. Drury’s virtue has become “matter” for our actions, while her actual materials refuse abstraction into a conventional historical narrative. We will see the association between materiality and anti-historical time re-emerge later in the century, in the misanthropic antiquarianism of Browne’s *Hydriotaphia* and in Marvell’s contraction of the histories of “Rome, Greece, Palestine” into a pattern of leaves in “Upon Appleton House.” For Donne, though, unassimilable materiality seems to be a particular condition of Drury’s gender—or, at least, of one of her genders.

Despite Donne’s concern with “materials,” the *Anniversaries* are also full of ghosts: not only the “ghost” of Elizabeth Drury, but also the spectral forms of Donne’s old literary personae. We have already encountered the shades of Satire III, *Ignatius his Conclave*, and the erotic *Songs and Sonnets*, but an even more obvious ghostly presence is that of *Metempsychosis* (c. 1601). This verse satire, circulated only in manuscript in the seventeenth century, follows “the progress of a deathless soul” (1) through increasingly complex life forms, from the apple eaten in Paradise to a whale to Themech, “[s]ister and wife to Caín” (510), to an unnamed person of influence who “here amongst us now / Doth dwell” (61-62). It is no accident that *Metempsychosis* and the *Second Anniversary* share a subtitle (*The Progress of the Soul*), or that the *Anniversaries* recycle specific ideas, images, and even phrases from *Metempsychosis*. Let us return to these three lines from the *Anatomy*:

For that first marriage was our funeral:
One woman at one blow then killed us all,
And singly, one by one, they kill us now. (I.105-107)

This is an obvious reworking (and improvement) of three lines from *Metempsychosis*:

Man all at once was there by woman slain,
And one by one we’re here slain o’er again
By them. (91-93)
In both content and satiric style, the *Anniversaries* constitute a metempsychosis of *Metempsychosis*, a reincarnation in altered form of the themes that had preoccupied an earlier Donne. Rosalie Colie astutely criticizes the tendency of some scholars “to read [the *Anniversaries*] as if they are, no matter what, harmonious wholes and thus to ignore or deplore those sections which do not manifest proper proportion or integration.” Indeed, the *Anatomy* itself reminds us that we cannot trust our perception of the world’s structures. “The world’s proportion disfigured is” (I.302); thus, all that we perceive with our senses—“springs and summers” (I.203), “[c]olour and lustre” (I.340), even the passing of time—are corrupted more deeply than we think they are. Why should the same not be true of literary genres and conventions? Despite the *Anniversaries*’ focus on the corruption of the world and the soul’s release after death, the poems remain tied to secular experience through passages that recall Donne’s earlier career as an amatory poet and verse satirist. It seems fitting that Donne, in his last major poetic work before taking religious orders, would revisit so much of the intellectual and emotional territory he had covered in the last decade of the sixteenth century.

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Chapter Two: Political Time

He was perfectly astonished with the historical Account I gave him of our Affairs during the last Century; protesting it was only an Heap of Conspiracies, Rebellions, Murders, Massacres, Revolutions, Banishments; the very worst Effects that Avarice, Faction, Hypocrisy, Perfidiousness, Cruelty, Rage, Madness, Hatred, Envy, Lust, Malice, and Ambition could produce.

—Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*

1. Time and Language

In the most famous passage of *Leviathan* (1651), Thomas Hobbes describes the plight of man outside society:

> Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of Warre, where every man is Enemy to every man; the same is consequent to the time, wherein men live without other security, than what their own strength, and their own invention shall furnish them withall. In such condition there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported from the Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short. (2:192)\(^{143}\)

Three and a half centuries of casual reading have ossified the series of adjectives in the last sentence into a misleading catchphrase for Hobbes’s view of the human condition in general. It is no wonder, then, that the phrase has also overshadowed the details of the passage it concludes.

Previous scholarship has largely overlooked the fact that Hobbes names an “account of Time” as one of the benefits that humanity stands to lose in a state of war. Earlier in the same chapter, Hobbes proposes counterintuitively that human conflict arises not from inequality but from a general “equality of ability,” which produces “equality of hope in the attaining of our Ends”

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Absent a strong central authority, this parity of mental and physical strength will lead inevitably to conflict, and eventually to a state of war. The only difference between all-out war and small-scale struggle is time: “For warre, consisteth not in Battell onely, or the act of fighting; but in a tract of time, wherein the Will to contend by Battell is sufficiently known: and therefore the notion of Time, is to be considered in the nature of Warre” (2:192; emphasis in original). Extending this principle, we can say that an awareness of time allows for abstraction from the particular to the general: in other words, it allows for philosophy. Though Hobbes’s discussions of time have so far escaped sustained scholarly attention, their importance to his political philosophy—and to our understanding of early modern temporality—cannot be overstated.

This chapter will consider Hobbes’s materialist accounts of time in two of his midcentury works: *Leviathan*, published in 1651, and *Behemoth, or the Long Parliament*, written around 1668 and published posthumously in 1681. In both works, Hobbes uses the concept of time as a weapon against the intellectual and moral authority of the past and the people who overvalue that authority. Hobbes’s principal bugbears in *Leviathan* are Aristotle’s scholastic interpreters, who propound false accounts of time that threaten the stability of the commonwealth by divorcing cause from effect and language from material reality. *Leviathan* is thus itself a correct account of time, a bulwark against the state of war. For Hobbes, however, a correct account of time is not necessarily one that hews to the historical record. Indeed, as I will show, his theory of the covenant between subjects and sovereign is based on a pair of historical fictions whose inaccuracy he freely admits. *Behemoth*, a philosophical dialogue about the origins of the Civil

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War, is another experiment in unorthodox historiography, diverging from conventional histories in both form and content: a “History not so much of the actions that pass’d in the time of the late troubles, as of their Causes, and of their Councells, and Artifice by which they were brought to passe” (166). But though Hobbes argues in *Leviathan* that awareness of linear time—and thus of cause and effect—is one of the defining characteristics of humanity, his own versions of cause and effect are more complicated than they might seem at first glance.

Crucial to Hobbes’s concept of time is his ambivalent endorsement of leisure. More important to him than discrete events (i.e. the raw matter of Renaissance political historiography) are the potential-filled spaces of time between actions. If human nature is characterized by temporal perception, he argues, human society is characterized by the existence of free time: “Leasure is the mother of Philosophy; and Common-wealth, the mother of Peace, and Leasure” (3:1054). But leisure is not an unambiguous good, for the philosophy it produces is not always sound. Indeed, that philosophy can itself generate false accounts of time, such as the scholastic belief that eternity is not an “Endlesse Succession of Time” but the “Standing still of the Present Time” (3:1084). In *Behemoth*, too, Hobbes enumerates the ills that can result from the abuse, or absence, of leisure time, concluding that supporters of the regicide absorbed dangerous theories “from the Pulpit, and vpon Holy-days” (159). For Hobbes, leisure is a middle category between time and history: it is time in the world (that is, not in the abstract), but before it takes shape and hardens into history. The first section of this chapter will focus on the connection that Hobbes identifies between time and language, with particular attention to the first part of *Leviathan*, “Of Man.” My second section will explore what Hobbes and other early modern writers meant by “account of time,” a phrase whose definition was far from constant in the seventeenth century. For Hobbes, language is itself a means of marking time and continuing the memory of the past;
but it can also be misused in the service of false accounts of time. I will also discuss Hobbes’s concept of leisure as a condition for both the true accounting of time and the development of “Vain Philosophy” (3:1076). My third section will consider the anti-historical bent of Leviathan. In my final section, I will read Behemoth as an idiosyncratic kind of history, one that puts into practice the temporal and historical theories that Hobbes articulates in Leviathan.

Before proceeding further, we must differentiate between the categories of “time” and “history” in Hobbes’s political philosophy. This distinction is especially important as so many scholars seem oddly reluctant to make it. Though the two categories are of course related, Hobbes represents them as fundamentally opposed: conventional history is a false account of time, and correct temporal perception helps us to understand the flaws in the historical record. William R. Lund argues that “despite rejecting the utility of both ‘free will’ and concrete historical knowledge, Hobbes’s political philosophy paradoxically expands historical consciousness by embedding the individual in a temporal world and by making him responsible for, as well as tied to, that world.”145 Lund thus implies that “historical knowledge” is fundamentally different from “historical consciousness,” but this distinction did not exist in the seventeenth century. Though I agree with Lund’s essential conclusion—that Hobbes is less interested in “concrete historical knowledge” than he is in the individual’s awareness of time—I would rephrase Lund’s “historical consciousness” as “temporal consciousness.” Hobbes is primarily a temporal, not a historical, thinker.

But this does not mean, as Loralea Michaelis argues, that Hobbes’s “demotion of the study of history” implies hostility or indifference toward the past in general.146 In Leviathan,

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Michaelis claims, Hobbes stresses not “the preservation of what is or what has been, the overcoming of its loss, or even the work of its recovery but rather the anticipation of what is not yet and never will be, since the future is by definition a time of which there can be no knowledge or experience.” Far from ignoring or downplaying the past, however, Hobbes makes it the basis of his theory of the human condition. He displays intense interest in how human beings come to terms with both the distant and the recent past. What he does not do—and this is where the confusion seems to arise—is present the past as nothing more than the raw matter of history. “Hobbes never disowned the general purpose of the political historians—to persuade people to do things that would secure the collective good, but, officially at least, he distrusted historical narrative as the correct medium of persuasion,” writes Tom Sorell. I would take this argument even further and propose that Hobbes’s version of the past works against history, not in its service.

Hobbesian temporality is also intimately connected with language. Though scholars have not yet given this connection the attention it deserves, the past two decades have seen a consensus on the importance of language to Hobbes’s philosophical project, as well as a growing willingness to read Leviathan in particular as a work of literature. Hobbes was not just a skilled wordsmith; he was also keenly aware, perhaps more than any other early modern philosopher, of the role of language in the development of society. Philip Pettit argues that for

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147 Ibid., 104.
Hobbes, “human minds are made by words.” Indeed, Hobbes views language as the defining characteristic of humanity, for “access to speech introduced amour propre . . . as distinct from the amour de soi that we share with simple animals, the natural concern for our day-to-day welfare.” But even as language fosters narcissism and self-importance, it also allows people “to bind themselves to one another and make possible the fruits of such commitment.” Language, then, is never more than an ambivalent evil or an ambivalent good, and any science that relies too heavily on language is bound to be flawed. Robert P. Kraynak notes that Hobbes distrusts dialectical science because it “develops the tendencies that are latent in every kind of speech into a formal method of rational inquiry. It thereby gives a kind of official sanction to borrowing words on trust and to reasoning from authority. It also strengthens the tendency to use words for recognition because it seeks to define words in terms of other words, usually by multiplying verbal distinctions, rather than by asking for definitions in terms of mental thoughts.” When language is generated by “verbal distinctions” instead of by thoughts or experiences, the epistemological timeline stops short. Any misuse of language, therefore, is also a misuse of time.

In Leviathan’s second chapter, “Of Imagination,” Hobbes advances what might be termed an epistemology of decay. Like Plato and Aristotle, Hobbes derives his theory of time from a theory of motion: “When a Body is once in motion, it moveth (unless something else hinder it) eternally; and whatsoever hindreth it, cannot in an instant, but in time, and by degrees quite extinguish it” (2:26). In the same way, objects leave impressions on “the internall parts of a man . . . For after the object is removed, or the eye shut, we still retain an image of the thing.

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151 Ibid., 3.
152 Ibid., 66.
seen, though more obscure than when we see it. And this is it, the Latines call *Imagination.*”

Imagination, then, is “nothing but decaying sense . . . The decay of sense in men waking, is not the decay of the motion made in sense; but an obscuring of it, in such manner, as the light of the Sun obscureth the light of the Starres; which starrs do no less exercise their vertue by which they are visible, in the day, than in the night” (2:26-28). The undecayed moment of sensation still exists in a past inaccessible to us, and the work of “*Imagination* and *Memory,* [which] are but one thing” (2:28), is to keep alive as much of that sensory past as possible. The difference between memory and imagination is merely semantic: “when we would express the *decay,* and signifie that the *Sense* is fading, old, and past, it is called *Memory*” (2:28). Unlike Donne and other early modern religious writers, Hobbes does not conceive of decay as a teleological process ending in apocalypse. Quite the opposite: by laying waste to our sensory experiences, decay is in fact the foundation of our positive actions, the process that makes us active participants in the world. Society thus centers on our attempts to reckon with decay, the tribute continually exacted by time. Nothing could be further from Michaelis’s conclusion that Hobbes “privileges the future to a degree that is unprecedented in the history of political philosophy.”¹⁵⁴ Rather, he articulates what may be the seventeenth century’s most explicitly materialist explanation of humanity’s relationship to time—an explanation founded on “decaying sense.”

Whereas Plato and Aristotle connect time with the motion of the external world, Hobbes argues that time is an effect of *internal* movement: “All Fancies are Motions within us, reliques of those made in the Sense” (2:38). These internal motions are of course made by external objects, but it is only after we register the impressions that we become aware of our place within time. It is no coincidence that Hobbes uses the word “reliques” while laying the groundwork of a

political treatise so savagely critical of Catholicism and the illusions that abound in its “kingdom of darkness.” To call a thought a “relic” is to emphasize its essential deceptiveness: there is no recapturing the purity of the initial sensory impression. A collection of these relics constitutes a “Mentall Discourse” (2:38), the basis of language; this internal, private discourse can be either “Vnguided, without Desigene, and inconstant” (2:38) or “more constant; as being regulated by some desire, and designe” (2:40). But even the first kind of mental discourse is “not altogether so casuall as it seems to be,” for “we have no Transition from one Imagination to another, whereof we never had the like before’ in our Senses” (2:38). Not only our discrete thoughts but also the connections between them are rooted in our experience of the world (though Hobbes’s later critique of language detached from experience would seem to contradict this). To perceive time is necessarily to perceive the decay of our own sensations of the world, not the decay or alteration of the world itself.

It is curious, then, that Hobbes illustrates this concept with a historical anecdote:

And yet in this wild ranging of the mind, a man may oft-times perceive the way of it, and the dependance of one thought upon another. For in a Discourse of our present civill warre, what would seem more impertinent than to ask (as one did) what was the value of a Roman Penny? Yet the Cohaerence to me was manifest enough. For the Thought of the warre, introduced the Thought of the delivering up the King to his Enemies; The Thought of that, brought in the Thought of the delivering up of Christ; and that again the Thought of the 30 pence, which was the price of that treason; and thence easily followed that malicious question; and all this in a moment of time; for Thought is quick. (2:40)

Several aspects of this passage are unclear. Was the unnamed “Discourse” written or spoken? Who was the “one” who asked the question? Why has Hobbes chosen an example in which he reconstructs the “Cohaerence” not of his own mental discourse but of someone else’s? Why has he chosen a concrete example at all, when by his own account “Examples prove nothing” (3:_)? We are immediately thrust into the position of puzzling out Hobbes’s own “Trayne of Thoughts” (2:38). Noel Malcolm speculates that the unnamed “Discourse” may refer to John Ashburnham,
“widely blamed by royalists for having betrayed [Charles I] to the parliamentary governor of the Isle of Wight,” or, more likely, to the Scots, who in 1647 “had handed Charles I to the English parliamentary authorities, receiving £100,000 as the first instalment of an agreed payment of £400,000 (ostensibly for arrears of pay for the Scots army, and for its removal from England).”\textsuperscript{155} In my own reading, the exact content of the discourse matters less to Hobbes’s argument than does his idiosyncratic use of history to illustrate the most fundamental and private operations of human thought—operations which are themselves founded on the process of decay, not the promise of immortality, and which occur in an ephemeral “moment of time: for Thought is quick.”

Language is essential to the reconstruction of past sensory impressions, for it “makes that which was found true \textit{here}, and \textit{now}, to be true in \textit{all times and places}” (2:54). (More on that interesting phrase “found true” later.) Language is, in other words, a time- and labor-saving technology, “a profitable Invention for continuing the memory of time past” (2:48). Here Hobbes both draws on and diverges from an earlier work, \textit{The Elements of Law Natural and Politic} (1640), in which he states that language’s “first use is the expression of our conceptions . . . and that is called TEACHING; wherein if the conceptions of him that teacheth continually accompany his words, beginning at something from experience, then it begetteth the like evidence in the hearer that understandeth them, and that is called LEARNING” (64).\textsuperscript{156} In other words, language is inherently social, and its chief purpose is to convey one individual’s imagination or memory to another: \textit{homo sapiens} in civilization is necessarily also \textit{homo loquens}. For Hobbes, language is itself an account of time, “whereby men register their Thoughts; recall them when they are past; and also declare them one to another for mutuall utility and conversation; without which, there

\textsuperscript{155} Malcolm, \textit{Leviathan}, vol. 2, fn. 40c.
had been amongst men, neither Common-wealth, nor Society, nor Contract, nor Peace, no more than amongst Lyons, Bears, and Wolves” (2:48).

But language is not an unalloyed good, for it can easily detach from external reality and begin referring only to itself. In The Elements of Law, Hobbes identifies “two sorts of men that be commonly called learned,” each category distinguished by a proper or improper use of language. The mathematici reason “evidently from humble principles,” while the dogmatici “take up maxims from their education, and from the authority of men, or of custom, and take the habitual discourse of the tongue for ratiocination” (67). These misuses of language stem from a faulty approach to the past: either the recent past (one’s own education) or the ancient past (custom and ancient authors). The language of the mathematici, on the other hand, represents a correct approach to the past: their language, like imagination and memory, can be traced back to a set of sensory impressions. In Leviathan, the line between the correct use of language and the scholastic “abuse of words” (2:122) is less clear. The “first use” of language is no longer to teach others but “to Register, what by cogitation, wee find to be the cause of any thing, present or past; and what we find things present or past may produce, or effect: which in summe, is acquiring of Arts” (2:50). Language has turned inward, becoming a tool by which an individual situates himself in time. The second use of language, corresponding to its first use in Elements, is “to shew to others the knowledge which we have attained; which is to Counsel, and Teach one another”; the third use is “to make known to others our wills, and purposes, that we may have mutuall help of one another.” But the fourth use, like the first, carries overtones of solipsism: “to please and delight our selves, and others, by playing with our words, for pleasure or ornament, innocently.” The shortest subordinate clauses in this impressive series—“and others” and “innocently”—protest not quite enough, leaving the onanistic implications of “to please and
delight ourselves” and “playing with our words” to linger. Every user of language is a potential *dogmaticus*, a potential abuser of the past.

Each of the four uses of language has a corresponding misuse, a sort of shadow form. The perversions of the first use of language comes “when men register their thoughts wrong, by the inconstancy of the signification of their words . . . and so deceive themselves”; the perversion of the second, “when they use words metaphorically; that is, in other sense than that they are ordained for; and thereby deceive others” (2:50). Hobbes’s first focused attack on Aristotelianism comes early in Part I, when he illustrates the scholastic “abuse of words” with a passage by the Spanish scholastic philosopher and Jesuit priest Francisco Suárez (1548-1617):

> What is the meaning of these words. The first cause does not necessarily inflow anything into the second, by force of the Essential subordination of the second causes, by Which it may help to worke? They are the Translation of the Title of the sixth chapter of Suárez first Booke, Of the Concourse, Motion, and Help of God. When men write whole volumes of such stuffe, are they not Mad, or intend to make others so? (2:122)

This passage is structured to provide the maximum in satirical payoff. Hobbes frames Suárez’s jargon-filled sentence with two deadpan statements in the plainest English: “What is the meaning of these words,” and “When men write such stuff, are they not mad, or intend to make others so?” With the exceptions of “meaning” and “intend,” every word in these sentences is monosyllabic and derived from Anglo-Saxon. As a counterpoint to Suárez’s “necessarily,” “essential,” and “subordination,” Hobbes supplies the equally vague, but far simpler and punchier, “stuff.” He allows the scholastic language to parody itself, pointedly refusing to engage with its content; indeed, he has already denied that such language carries any meaning at all. If it has no meaning, it cannot be refuted. For Hobbes, scholastic arguments are completely self-contained, their form indistinguishable from their content. Hobbes sees
university philosophy as demanding nothing from the reader—neither comprehension nor reaction.

The schoolmen’s “abuse of words” is also an abuse of time. Language is meant to continue the memory of past sensations; scholastic jargon, which is based on nothing, continues the memory of nothing. Instead of recording past experience and laying a foundation for future discourse, university philosophers strive to render their language independent of anything past or future. Their jargon exists in a temporal vacuum, just as their arguments exist in a social vacuum: Aristotelian philosophy has no content with which a reasonable person can argue. We have all strayed from the Adamic language, in which every word achieved perfect mimesis of the concept it represented, but the schoolmen have strayed farthest of all:

I do not find any thing in the Scripture, out of which, directly or by consequence can be gathered, that Adam was taught the names of all Figures, Numbers, Measures, Colours, Sounds, Fancies, Relations; the names of Words and Speech, as General, Special, Affirmative, Negative, Interrogative, Optative, Infinitive, all which are useful; and least of all, of Entity, Intentionality, Quiddity, and other insignificant words of the School. (2:48)

Post-Babel language exists on a continuum from simply non-Adamic (and thus already corrupted) to literally “insignificant”: that is, incapable of signifying anything beyond itself. There is no obvious divide here between “good” and “bad” language: even some words “which are useful” have a certain scholastic savor. The schoolmen’s “insignificant words” can produce nothing but more words: that is, they are detached from the flow of cause and effect. But “useful” words like “infinitive” and “optative” also describe nothing but language. Our very participation in a linguistic system makes us misusers of time.

Even Hobbes’s criticism of the schoolmen’s Latin implicates us: “The Language also, which they use, both in the Churches, and in their Publique Acts, being Latine, which is not commonly used by any Nation now in the world, what is it but the Ghost of the old Romane
Language?" (3:1118). This might seem disingenuous, given that Hobbes had tutored the young earl of Devonshire in Latin (among other subjects) from 1630 to 1640, had already written several Latin treatises, and would translate Leviathan itself into Latin in the 1660s. It is tempting to argue that despite his own mastery of Latin, Hobbes foresaw its imminent decline within the European republic of letters. (“By the turn of the eighteenth century,” writes Lorraine Daston, “French had replaced Latin as the lingua franca of the learned world, reflecting the ascendancy of French science and letters under the reign of Louis XIV.”) But it seems more likely that Hobbes is doing here for “ghosts” what he has already done for “relics”: suggesting that the schoolmen’s errors are more widespread than they might appear. In Hobbes’s account, all language is ghostly, giving new life and motion to our “decaying sense.” It should be noted that in his Latin translation, Hobbes renders “decaying sense” as “Sensio deficiens sive Phantasma dilutum & evanidum”: “a fading sense or weak and vanishing apparition” (2:27; translation mine). Fittingly, imagination is even ghostlier in Hobbes’s Latin than it is in his English.

Human consciousness may be founded on decay, but we can at least avoid valuing the past for its age alone. Like the antiquarian, a frequent butt of satire in the mid-seventeenth century, the false philosopher deals in useless relics: relics of both language and religion. In his chapter on “Daemonology, and other Reliques of the Religion of the Gentiles,” Hobbes suggests that “if a man would wel observe that which is delivered in the Histories, concerning the

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157 In Hobbes’s Latin version, “the Ghost of the old Roman Language” becomes “linguae Latinae veteris Imago” (3:1119). Imago can mean either “image” or “ghost.” Considering that Hobbes uses spectris (ablative plural of spectrum) to mean “ghosts” earlier in the same passage, it seems likely that he intended imago to convey the double meaning.

Religious Rites of the Greeks and Romanes, I doubt not but he might find many more of these old empty Bottles of Gentilisme, which the Doctors of the Romane Church, either by Negligence, or Ambition, have filled up again with the new Wine of Christianity, that will not fail in time to break them” (3:1050). Hobbes evidently takes the same view of ancient politics: in a truly disastrous antiquarian project, his contemporaries have filled the “old empty Bottles” of Roman republicanism with the cultural and political energies of seventeenth-century England. But the overvaluation of relics is an error to which every human being is prone, because our very sense impressions are “reliques.” Throughout his works, Hobbes emphasizes that the schoolmen’s errors are not confined to the schoolmen: in fact, they are easy for anyone to make, because they proceed from the first principles of perception and knowledge. Hobbes’s elaborate critique of “Vain Philosophy, derived to the Universities, and thence into the Church, partly from Aristotle, partly from Blindnesse of understanding” (3:1076) operates on two levels. It is a heartfelt attack on specific philosophical doctrines employed by the rebels and regicides; but it also functions metaphorically, drawing our attention to the more mundane blindnesses that affect all human beings. The schoolmen’s refusal to found their knowledge on sense is itself an error proceeding from the limitations of the senses—surely one of the greatest ironies of Leviathan.

Hobbes casts our relationship to the future as similar to our relationship to the past: awareness of it makes us human, but fixation on it presents a real danger. We naturally strive to predict the future just as we strive to recapture the past, but we can realize neither goal, except imperfectly. “No Discourse whatever,” Hobbes argues, “can End in absolute knowledge of Fact, past, or to come. For, as for the knowledge of Fact, it is originally, Sense; and after, Memory. And for the knowledge of Consequence, which I have said before is called Science, it is not Absolute, but Conditionall” (2:98). In other words, we can know “if This be, That is,” but not
“that this, or that, is, has been, or will be” (2:98). Sensory experience is the only legitimate basis for knowledge, but it is inevitably limited. We can know generally but not specifically, conditionally but not absolutely. This does not mean, however, that we must put aside all thoughts of the future, for “the Felicity of this life, consisteth not in the repose of a mind satisfied . . . Nor can a man any more live, whose Desires are at an end, than he, whose Senses and Imaginations are at a stand” (2:150). “Senses and Imaginations” are our imperfect links to the past, and “Desires” our equally imperfect links to the future. Hobbes identifies as “a generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth only in Death” (2:150). By this he means not that we should expunge our boundless desire from our constitutions, nor yet obey its every prompt, but that we should strive to turn it to worthy ends.

In a distinctly Hobbesian turn of phrase, Arlene W. Saxonhouse characterizes Hobbes’s philosophical career as “a process of generalization of moral flaws into descriptive statements of man’s nature.” Victoria Kahn carries this argument further, proposing that seventeenth-century political theorists like Hobbes sought “to recast self-love as the spur to self-interest, to join fear of violent death and rational consent, channeling the one and promoting the other. In the process, the most volatile passions were reimagined as some of the most dependable and calculable.”

For Hobbes, there can be no moral hierarchy of the passions, since all passions originate in humanity’s desire for power. Even the passions that we consider self-effacing are actually self-serving: Socrates’ renowned charity toward his students, for instance, was “an honourable pretence for the old to haunt the company of the young and beautiful” (45). This is not exactly a condemnation of Socrates; rather, it is a condemnation of the idea that any passion can be

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In 

Leviathan, Hobbes portrays temporal awareness as a kind of passion: inherent in human nature, morally ambiguous in itself, potentially destructive, but also capable of serving a wider social good. The “[desire] to know the event of an action” (2:42), for example, is neither good nor bad per se. But since “things to come have no being at all,” our predictions of the future will always be somewhat “fallacious” (2:42). The more experience we have, the more accurate our guesses will be, but we must not congratulate ourselves too warmly even if an outcome corresponds to our predictions: “And though it be called Prudence, when the Event answereth our expectation; yet in its own nature, it is but Presumption” (44). Likewise, our desire to recall the past produced speech, “the most noble and profitable invention of all other” (2:48), but this invention can also lead us astray: “For words are wise mens counters, they do but reckon by them: but they are the mony of fooles, that value them by the authority of an Aristotle, a Cicero or a Thomas, or any other Doctor whatsoever, if but a man” (2:58). Temporal awareness may define us as human beings, but only as human beings: it cannot elevate us above our all-too-human ignorance.

In the moving final paragraph of his preface to Leviathan, Hobbes expresses the hope that the experience evoked by his own language will speak directly to the reader’s experience, particularly if that reader happens to be a monarch:

He that is to govern a whole Nation, must read in himself, not this, or that particular man; but Man-kind: which though it be hard to do, harder to learn than any Language, or
Science; yet, when I shall have set down my own reading orderly, and perspicuously, the pains left another, will be onely to consider, if he also find not the same in himself. For this kind of Doctrine, admitteth no other Demonstration. (2:20)

But many of Hobbes’s contemporaries found “not the same” in themselves, instead complaining that for a treatise that purported to explain the fundamentals of human nature, Leviathan was remarkably difficult to comprehend. Edward Hyde, first Earl of Clarendon, Hobbes’s chief enemy at the Restoration court, attributed to him “a master faculty in making easie things hard to be understood.” In a rather tardy attack on Leviathan (written, like Leviathan itself, from exile in France), Clarendon dismissed Hobbes’s accounts of the passions as “not so exact as might have bin expected from so great an Artist; and . . . all those Chapters are rather for delight, in the novelty and boldness of the expression, then for any real information in the substantial part of knowledg.” The epithet “Artist” is telling: Clarendon detects and deplores Hobbes’s obvious pleasure in his own turns of phrase. Clarendon’s objection to Hobbes’s lack of exactitude is perhaps reasonable: readers of a political treatise founded on an assessment of human nature should, one imagines, be able to recognize themselves in that assessment. Reading Hobbes, the recognition is delayed or even, at times, not fully felt. But this delay makes the eventual moment of self-recognition pierce all the deeper. We laugh at Hobbes’s deadpan mockery of Aristotelian philosophy only to realize that we too are implicated in the mockery, no matter our own philosophical affiliations. Quentin Skinner identifies Hobbes as an originator of “that distinctive tone of ironic condescension which has left its mark on the writing of philosophy ever since.”

In his 1650 preface to William Davenant’s Gondibert, Hobbes reflects that poets “haue lodg’d themselves in the three Regions of mankind, Court, Citie, and Countrey . . . From hence

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163 Quentin Skinner, Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes, 211.
have proceeded three sorts of Poesie, *Heroique*, *Scommatique* and *Pastoral*. Every one of these is distinguished again in the manner of *Representation* . . . The Scommatique Narrative, is *Satyre*; Dramatique is *Comedie*” (53). Satire and comedy, then, are specifically urban genres, displaying the “insincereness, inconstancie, and troublesom humour of those that dwell in populous Cities, like the mobilitie, blustering, and impuritie of the air” (53). But Hobbes has already identified the work of poets as “imitating humane life . . . to avert men from vice, and incline them to virtuous and honourable actions” (52). It seems, then, that every “region of mankind” receives the poetic medicine it deserves, and comedy and satire are no less “virtuous and honorable” for partaking of the changeability and insincerity of the town. The unusual adjective “scommati[c],” meaning “[c]haracterized by gibe or scoff,” is supremely applicable to Hobbes’s own political philosophy. As Skinner observes, Hobbes “seeks in every instance to ‘show’ or portray his opponents—in advance of examining any of their arguments—as merely laughable.” Hobbes sees human nature through a scommatic lens: his satirical excursions are responses in kind to a species whose social life is defined by scoffing, mocking, and jostling for advantage. In *De Cive* (1647), he goes so far as to argue that “[a]ll society . . . exists for the sake either of advantage or of glory, i.e. it is a product of love of self, not of love of friends” (24). Language must reflect experience to be effective, and if the town deserves literary genres that reflect its own “insincereness, inconstancie, and troublesom humour,” humanity deserves a moral


philosophy that reflects its own desire for power and supremacy. In other words, it deserves *Leviathan*.

2. Accounting for Time

While an awareness of time belongs to man in general, only civilized man possesses an *account* of time, a concept that Hobbes leaves somewhat ambiguous. Though the phrase appears only once in *Leviathan*, Hobbes had used it just a year before in his essay on *Gondibert*. In a passage discussing the moral purpose of the “Heroick Poem,” Hobbes writes:

> All that is beautifull or defensible in building; or mervellous in Engines and Instruments of motion; Whatsoever commodity men receive from the observation of the Heavens, from the description of the Earth, from the account of Time, from walking on the Seas; and whatsoever distinguisheth the civility of *Europe*, from the Barbarity of the *American* salvages, is the workmanship of Fancy, but guided by the Precep[t]s of true Philosophy. But where these precepts fail, as they have hitherto failed in the doctrine of Morall virtue, there the Architect (*Fancy*) must take the Philosophers part upon her self. (132)

Hobbes almost certainly transcribed this passage from his draft of *Leviathan* (or vice versa): the passage I quoted at the beginning of this chapter enumerates many of the same benefits of civilization in roughly the same order, though not in exactly the same words. In *Leviathan*, “Engines and Instruments of motion” appears as “industry” and “instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force”; “walking on the Seas” as “navigation”; and “the description of the Earth” as “knowledge of the face of the earth.” However, one phrase that Hobbes does not reword is “account of time,” which suggests that it existed in his mind as a unit, the utmost distillation of a thought. But what exactly was the thought?

The phrase “account of time” carried several meanings in Hobbes’s lifetime. In the seventeenth century, it was generally used in the service of three genres: chronicle history, religious and moral writing, and natural philosophy. The first appearance of the phrase in print
occurred in Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande* (1577): “From that daye forwarde Certicus was reputed and taken for king of Weastsaxon, and so the same kyngdome at that tyme, whyche was as Harrison noteth it (whose orderly proceedyng in this behalfe; for the accoumpte of tyme, giueth greate lyght to our historie) the yeare of Christe fiue hundred and ninteene . . .” For Holinshed and other Elizabethan chroniclers, an “accoumpte of tyme” is a delineation of what happened when, and it usually relies on the testimony of other writers. In this case, the additional source is Holinshed’s contemporary William Harrison, author of a manuscript chronology detailing the workings of providence from the creation of the world to Elizabethan England. Indeed, Holinshed was the rare chronicle historian whose account of time was not primarily religious. Most chroniclers and chronologers focused on putting exact dates to biblical events, using scripture in conjunction with secular histories both ancient and modern. Their ultimate purpose was generally to determine either the age of the world or the number of years before its end.

The phrase “account of time” arose more than once in the context of the Book of Daniel, a focal text for chronologers wishing to calculate the number of years to come before the end of time. The principal event of the Book of Daniel is the Babylonian emperor Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of a colossal man—a leviathan, as it were—made of five materials: gold, silver, brass, iron, and clay. The statue crumbles before Nebuchadnezzar’s eyes, prompting him to seek advice from his wise men when he awakes. Nebuchadnezzar’s counselor Daniel interprets the dream as a prophecy foretelling the four ages of the world. In the era represented by the man’s feet, “part of potters’ clay, and part of iron,” God will establish a kingdom that will conquer all earthly

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kingdoms (Daniel 2:31-45). In the early modern period, as Daniel Rosenberg and Anthony Grafton have shown, Daniel’s prophecy attracted many millennial-minded chronologers who believed “they were living in the fourth, or Roman, empire, which would soon come to an end.”¹⁷⁰ Instead of accepting that events would unfold in a pattern beyond their comprehension, these chronologers exercised the same impulse displayed by their contemporaries who calculated the value of the Roman penny. Matthew’s thirty pence and Daniel’s four ages are simultaneously vague and precise: in each case the number is exact, but it represents an unknown quantity with no obvious contemporary significance. Each number is the pivot around which its narrative revolves, but this was not enough for early modern chronologers. Not content with observing the effects that Daniel’s prophecy produced in history, they insisted on setting the exact bounds of each era.

For Matthieu Beroald, author of *A short view of the Persian monarchie* (1590), calculating the duration of the Persian empire of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream was “needfull in this time, wherein some would make this Prophecie of Dan. 9 to bee worse than nothing: as speaking of a certaine number of yeres, to mens opinion hethertoo, but not so to bee vnderstood” (46).¹⁷¹ A correct account of time is one that restores the literal meaning of the passage and dispels the idea that Daniel’s prophecy is merely figurative:

Yet the death of Darius the last King of the Persians, the prophane Historie referres to the first yeare of the hundred & thirteenth Olympiade; and that yeare is the fift of Daniels nineteenth weeke . . . From which account of time we vnderstand, that the Persian

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¹⁷¹ Matthieu Beroald, *A short view of the Persian monarchie, and of Daniels weekes beeing a peece of Beroaldus workes: with a censure in some points* (London: printed by Thomas Orwin, 1590), 2-3. While praying for his sinful people, Daniel sees a vision of the angel Gabriel, who warns him that “[s]eventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy” (Daniel 9:24).
Monarchie is to haue allotted to it for the continuance a hundred and thiritie [sic] yeares, although otherwise hereof other men haue determined. (2-3)

Beroald’s synthesis of profane and sacred histories was also an attempt to verify each by the testimony of the other: “These Histories which Daniel hath set downe in few words, prophane Writers haue at large layde downe in their Writings: from which wee vnderstand the word of God to be most true, and all things to be gouerned by diuine decree and prouidence” (29-30). This is a striking admission: Beroald is conceding that not all readers take for granted the verity of scripture and the universal pervasiveness of providence. In attempting to make Daniel’s account of time correspond with the accounts of such pagan historians as “Herodotus, Thucidides, Xenophon, Ctesias, & Diodorus Siculus” (11), chronologers like Beroald all but admitted that the wider culture had stopped taking scriptural accounts of time on faith. Hence the sheer number of chronological accounts of time, each with its own range and interpretation of sources.

Though Beroald’s “computation of time” (4) may impress modern readers as an elaborate exercise in pedantry, it had an immediate and vital purpose: to calculate exactly how many years the world had left. Hobbes views religion as the object of man’s “perpetuall solicitude of the time to come” (2:164), and the ferment of millenarian prophecy in his lifetime more than answers this charge. Seven years after the appearance of Beroald’s history, the Cambridge scholar Edward Lively published his far more extensive A true chronologie of the times of the Persian monarchie . . . against the frivolous conceits of Matthew Beroald, in which he aims to provide “two thinges . . . the one is a iust account of the times: the other, a true interpretation of the wordes in the originall tongue.”172 Lively complains that inaccurate accounts of time damage

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172 Edward Lively, A true chronologie of the times of the Persian monarchie, and after to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romanes Wherein by the way briefly is handled the day of Christ his birth: with a declaration of
the credibility of both pagan historians and scripture itself: “So not onelie wrong is done to those excellent men, who by their paines haue deserued well: but also euen the certaintie of Gods worde it selfe, by this meanes is weakned, & made doubtfull, and called into question. For it is not possible that one truth should be repugnant to another.” Nor is it possible, in Lively’s view, that either account should be untrue. In constructing their accounts of time, the Elizabethan chronologers aim simultaneously to discount the authority of their contemporaries and strengthen the authority of the ancients. Small wonder that Hobbes mischievously dismisses the moderns’ praise of the ancients as proceeding “not from the reverence of the Dead, but from the competition, and mutuall envy of the Living” (3:1140).

In his History of the World (1617), Sir Walter Ralegh expresses a similar frustration with the pedantry of chronologers: “Wheresoeuer the account of times may suffer examination, the arguments are opposite, and contentions are such, as for ought that I see, men haue sought by so many wayes to vncouer the Sunne, that the dayes thereby are made more darke, and the clouds more condenst than before” (417). Instead of attempting his own account of “the times from the egression to the building of Salomons Temple, in the Persian Empire, the seuentie Weekes, and in what not,” Ralegh throws up his hands: “I can therefore giue no other warrant, than other men haue done in these computations: and therefore that such and such Kings and Kingdomes tooke beginning in this or that yeere, I auow it no otherwise than as a borrowed knowledge, or at least as a priuate opinion: which I submit to better iudgements” (417). Ralegh’s impatience with the intricacies of chronology reflects a larger cultural disenchantment with chronicle history. According to D. R. Woolf, “the market [for chronicles] had been largely glutted by 1600,” and the following decades saw the chronicle become “a collector’s item chiefly valued for its

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the angel Gabriels message to Daniel in the end of his 9. chap. against the friuolous conceits of Matthew Beroald (London: printed by Felix Kingston, 1597), 27.

information and quaint style.”¹⁷⁴ The original meaning of “account of time” had itself become outmoded, though it would not disappear entirely for decades.

But the phrase itself did not disappear; instead, it took on two new definitions, one moral and the other scientific. In the moral definition, an “account of time” was not a calculation of a duration of time but a record of a set of actions accomplished within a certain period. The early seventeenth century saw an increase in the number of books devoted to the evils of time-wasting and idleness, and many of these books exhort the reader to “make account of time” lest it slip away. The first usage of “account of time” in reference to idleness occurs in John Bodenham’s *Bel-vedère, or, The garden of the muses* (1600):

> Seuerus made such deare account of time,  
> As nothing grieu’d him more than losse of time.  
> Pyrrhus had priuat obseruations,  
> Whereby to know how time did steale away.  
> Philip of Macedon would chide him-selfe,  
> For the least vaine employment of his time.¹⁷⁵

In this example, time is a currency of which an individual can make “dear account”: the phrase suggests a ledger in which one records one’s temporal expenditures. Six years later, the Franciscan preacher Andrés de Soto explained that to “account of time” was to “vse time well; oh! yea carefully, solicitously, and most tenderly, not onely of a day, but also of each day; for he who well vnderstandeth and well disposeth of one day, may take patterne there by to square, proportion, and well dispose of, well order his whole life; and he compleatly is maister

thereof[.]"\(^{176}\) Here “account” takes on a semi-mathematical connotation: a day well spent becomes a scale model of a life well spent, and a correct account makes a man “maister” of his own time. Accurate reckoning implies complete possession; knowledge guarantees ownership. Any other account of time is, in Ralegh’s phrase, “a borrowed knowledge.”

No longer are writers referring to authority to verify their accounts of time; each person must manage his own time and take care to keep it out of the hands of others. In his 1630 character book *The English Gentleman*, a conduct manual for “the manage of publike or private affairs,” Richard Brathwaite argues that while a gentleman can enjoy occasional recreation (“He would take it, but not be taken by it”), he must not allow recreation to shade into idleness: “He holds it a blemish to the repute of a Gentleman; and an aspersion to his discretion, to make choice of those for his Associates, who make no more account of time, than how to passe it over.”\(^{177}\) Here the metaphor is less exact than in Bodenham or de Soto. Brathwaite’s “account” is not a ledger or other written text, but a general inclination not to take one’s own time for granted (he is using “account” in the now-rare sense of “estimate” or “reckoning”). There is the possibility here that accounts of time are infectious, and that if one’s friends are careless of time, one may become equally careless.

Indeed, for the Anglican clergyman William Fenner, an account of time was too delicate an undertaking for any mortal. In a curious sermon published in 1645, Fenner imagines God as a sort of omniscient biographer of his subjects’ virtues and vices: “[I]f God kept not a strict account of time, how many Sermons you have had, how many mercies you have injoyed, how

\(^{176}\) Andrés de Soto, *The ransome of time being captive Wherein is declared how precious a thing is time, how much he looseth that looseth it, & how it may be redeemed*, trans. J. H. (Douai: printed by Gerard Pinsone, 1634). This text was originally printed in Antwerp as *Redempcion del tiempo cavtivo* in 1606.

\(^{177}\) Richard Brathwaite, *The English gentleman containing sundry excellent rules or exquisite observations, tending to direction of every gentleman, of selecter ranke and qualitie; how to demeane or accommodate himselfe in the manage of publike or private affaires* (London: printed by John Haviland for Robert Bostock, 1630).
many crosses he hath warned you by: if God kept not a true talle [tally] and account of every houres time, you might rub on many dayes, and moneths, and yeers, and spend much time in fulfilling of your lusts; but God keepeth a reckoning of these things, yea of everie houre, and of every minute.”

Here the onus is on the individual not to take account of his own time but to perform actions that will redound to his benefit in the account that God draws up. In this fantasy of completely objective and completely personal history, we must be satisfied merely to know that such an account exists.

Scientific writers of the mid-seventeenth century use “account of time” in a sense closer to its original one, though with emphasis on present instead of past time. In this third sense, the phrase denotes the process of measuring the passage of time, usually with a clock or other instrument. One such chronometric instrument, the earliest version of the slide rule (then called the “circles of proportion”), sparked a fierce debate between the mathematicians William Oughtred and Richard Delamain in the early 1630s. Oughtred, Delamain’s former teacher, invented the circles of proportion, as well as a “Horizontal Instrument” designed “for laying out sundials on any kind of plane.” However, Oughtred feared that publishing an account of his new devices would encourage readers to value scientific instruments over mathematical theory, much as Marmion criticizes town fops for valuing pocket watches over time itself in *The Antiquary*. While Oughtred vacillated over whether or not to describe the circles of proportion and the “horizontal instrument” in print, Delamain did exactly that—and laid claim to both inventions, prompting an angry response from Oughtred. In their treatises on the new

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178 William Fenner, *A divine message to the elect soul Delivered in eight sermons upon seven severall texts* (London: printed by M. S. for John Stafford, 1645), 88-89. The phrase “rub on” means “continue in a certain course, esp. without undue difficulty or restraint” (OED). OED’s earliest example of this phrase is from 1668, but it seems clear that Fenner is using the phrase in the same way.

instruments, both mathematicians use “account of time” in the same way. Delamain explains how to use the slide rule to “finde the houre of the day” by the height of the sun: “This Proposition of finding the houre of the Sunnes being East or West, may serve to great use both on Sea and Land, in rectifying of Glasses, Watches, or such like, to keepe and Regulate the account of Time.” Likewise, Oughtred explains that his circles of proportion can be used for “keeping the account of time at Sea”: “This or any such way of keeping the time . . . I would advise were carefully, and with a kind as it were of religious diligence practised in all, specially long voyages.” We have, as it were, come full circle. The devotion prescribed by de Soto in his injunction to “vse time well” has metamorphosed into the “religious diligence” demanded by the emerging new science and its proliferating and ever more complex instruments of measurement.

From this brief survey of the phrase “account of time,” a number of cultural priorities and anxieties emerge. In the last decades of Elizabeth’s reign and the first half of the seventeenth century, English writers worried about miscalculating, losing, or misspending time, and were willing to devote a significant amount of time to rendering a correct account of it. All three of the definitions I have examined—the chronological, the moral, and the scientific—were still current in the late 1640s when Hobbes wrote Leviathan. But which definition did he have in mind when he wrote that man in a state of war possessed “no account of time”? A significant clue lies in Hobbes’s Latin translation of that passage. In the Latin Leviathan of 1668, “account of time”

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180 Richard Delamain, Grammelogia, or, The mathematicall ring extracted from the logarythmes, and projected circular (1631), 59.
181 William Oughtred, An addition vnto the use of the instrument called the circles of proportion, for the working of nauticall questions Together with certaine necessary considerations and advertisements touching navigation (London: printed by Augustine Mathewes, 1633), 15.
becomes “Temporum computatio” (2:193). Whereas *tempus* usually connotes the abstract idea of time, its plural *tempora* (of which *temporum* is the genitive) signifies something more concrete: a period that can be divided by measurement or *computatio* into hours, days, or years, as in the opening lines of Ovid’s *Fasti*: “Tempora cum causis Latium digesta per annum / lapsaque sub terras ortaque signa canam” (“The order of the calendar throughout the Latin year, its causes, and the starry signs that set beneath the earth and rise again, of these I’ll sing”). Beroald himself uses the phrase “computation of time” in his chronology of the Persian empire, noting that “it commeth to passe, that the prophane storie is verie obscure: which obscuritie we are able to dispearse & to make cleere, by that computation of time which we haue laide downe” (4).

Hobbes constructs his own miniature chronology in a chapter generally overlooked by scholars: “Of the Number, Antiquity, Scope, and Interpreters of the Books of Holy Scripture.” He begins by acknowledging explicitly what earlier chronologers acknowledged tacitly:

> Who were the originall writers of the severall Books of Holy Scripture, has not been made evident by any sufficient testimony of other History, (which is the only proof of matter of fact); nor can be by any arguments of naturall Reason; for Reason serves only to convince the truth (not of fact, but) of consequence. The light therefore that must guide us in this question, must be that which is held out unto us from the Bookes themselves: And this light, though it show us not the writer of every book, yet it is not unusefull to give us knowledge of the time, wherein they were written. (3:588)

This accords with Hobbes’s usual approach to history: its writers are mere human beings, all driven by the same passions and desires, and it is unwise to devote too much time to puzzling out their identities. Hobbes himself devotes more time to snidely dismissing the assumptions made by casual readers of scripture: “And first, for the *Pentateuch*, it is not argument enough that they were written by *Moses*, because they are called the five Books of *Moses*; no more than these titles, The Book of *Joshua*, the Book of *Judges*, The Book of *Ruth*, and the Books of the *Kings,*

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are arguments sufficient to prove, that they were written by *Joshua*, by the *Judges*, by *Ruth*, and by the *Kings*” (3:590). He also constructs perfunctory timelines of the Old Testament prophets (“*Jeremiah, Abdias, Nahum,* and *Habakkuk* prophesied in the time of Josiah. *Ezekiel, Daniel, Aggeus,* and *Zacharias,* in the Captivity” [3:598]); but his principal purpose in this chapter is to establish not the identities or historical periods of the scriptural authors, but “from whence the scriptures derive their authority.” Predictably, he concludes that scripture cannot become civil law “by any other Authority, then that of the Common-wealth, residing in the Soveraign, who only has the Legislative power” (3:604). According to Clarendon, “many men . . . do suspect [i.e. deem suspicious] that he found it necessary to his purpose, first to lessen the reverence that was accustom'd to be paid to the Scriptures themselves, and the authority thereof, before he could hope to have his interpretation of them hearken'd unto, and received.”

Hobbes’s flirtation with chronology produced the opposite of what chronology usually produced: not an intricately constructed web of historical and religious authority but an evacuation of that authority from every source but the civil power.

Further clues to what Hobbes means by “account of time” can be derived from Hobbes’s use of the word “account” throughout *Leviathan*. He generally uses the word in its literal sense, e.g. “They that have Authority concerning the Treasure, as Tributes, Impositions, Rents, Fines, or whatsoever publique revenue, to collect, receive, issue, or take the Accounts thereof, are Publique Ministers” (2:378). Occasionally, however, he uses it in the moralistic sense: the sovereign’s ultimate duty, he argues, is “the procuration of *the safety of the people*; to which he is obliged by the Law of Nature, and to render an account thereof to God, the Author of that

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Law, and to none but him” (2:520). So far, so orthodox; but Hobbes also offers an unusual
account of “account” in the fourth chapter of *Leviathan*, “Of Speech”:

> Subject to Names, is whatsoever can enter into, or be considered in an account; and be
> added one to another to make a summe; or substracted one from another, and leave a
> remainder. The Latines called Accounts of mony *Rationes*, and accounting, *Ratiocinatio*:
> and that which we in bills or books of account call *Items*, they called *Nomina*; that is,
> *Names*: and thence it seems to proceed, that they extended the word *Ratio*, to the faculty
> of Reckoning in all other things. (2:58)

Hobbes does not define “account,” but he acknowledges both its literal (i.e. financial) and its
metaphorical usages, linking the word to the concept of “ratiocination” or, simply, reasoning. In
linguistic terms, according to Hobbes, to “enter into account” is to be susceptible to
categorization: “a thing may enter into account for Matter, or Body; as Living, Sensible,
Rationall, Hot, Cold, Moved, Quiet; with all which names the word Matter, or Body is
understood; all such, being names of Matter” (2:58). In this sense of “account,” to make an
“account of time” is precisely to categorize it as time—to determine what qualifies as time and
how it can be described: “because the same things may enter into account for divers accidents;
their names are (to shew that diversity) diversely wrested, and diversified” (2:58).

In the passage I quoted at the beginning of this chapter, the phrase “account of time” is
poised neatly between science and art. Preceding it are *industry, agriculture, navigation,*
building, transportation, and natural history and geography (“Knowledge of the face of the
Earth”); following it are *arts, letters, and society.* In Hobbes’s preface to *Gondibert*, however,
“account of time” is more closely allied to the sciences (“from the observation of the Heavens,
from the description of the Earth, from the account of Time, from walking on the Seas”). All of
these practices are “the workmanship of Fancy, but guided by the Precep[t]s of true Philosophy,”
whereas poetry is the work of fancy alone. In the first part of *Leviathan*, Hobbes equates fancy
with imagination: “This Decaying Sense, when wee would express the thing it self, (I mean
Fancy it selfe,) wee call Imagination” (2:28). Like every other intellectual endeavor, an account of time originates in a series of sensory impressions and is given order by philosophy. Just as Hobbes follows “Knowledge of the face of the Earth” with “account of Time,” so he repeatedly employs metaphors of geography and physical distance in his discussions of temporality. His most poignant account of time in _Leviathan_ is also an account of space:

For the continuall change of mans body, destroyes in time the parts which in sense were moved: So that distance of time, and place, hath one and the same effect in us. For as at a great distance of place, that which wee look at, appears dimme, and without distinction of the smaller parts; and as Voyces grow weak, and inarticulate: so also after great distance of time, our imagination of the Past is weak; and we lose (for example) of Cities wee have seen, many particular Streets; and of Actions, many particular Circumstances. (2:28)

In this passage, time is doubly linked to space: it functions metaphorically as space and it _encompasses_ specific (here urban) spaces. He twice uses the phrase “tract of time,” once when discussing the post-Babel shattering of the Adamic language (“the diversity of Tongues . . . in tract of time grew every where more copious” [2:50]) and again, as we have seen, when distinguishing between battle and the state of war (“WARRE, consisteth . . . in a tract of time, wherein the Will to contend by Battell is sufficiently known” [2:192]). In _Behemoth_, the geographical metaphor takes on a third dimension and becomes topographical: “If in time as in place there were degrees of _high_ and _low_, I verily beleue that the highest of time would be that which passed between the years of 1640 and 1660” (107). Given the evident association between temporal and geographical accounts in Hobbes’s mind, it is no wonder that “account of Time” immediately follows “Knowledge of the face of the Earth” in the best-known passage of _Leviathan_.

Hobbes’s use of the phrase participates in not only the scientific definition, which emphasizes the measurement of lived experience, but also the moral definition, which emphasizes leisure. In part 3 of _Leviathan_, Hobbes explains that all philosophy, whether vain or
true, originates in the leisure time that comes into existence when individuals unite under a central power:

Leasure is the mother of Philosophy; and Common-wealth, the mother of Peace, and Leasure. Where first were great and flourishing Cities, there was first the study of Philosophy. . . . From this it was, that the place where any of them [Greek philosophers] taught, and disputed, was called Schola, which in their Tongue signifieth Leasure; and their Disputations, Diatribae, that is to say, Passing of the time. Also the Philosophers themselves had the name of their Sects, some of them from these their Schools . . . as if we should denominate men from More-fields, from Pauls-Church, and from the Exchange, because they meet there often, to prate and loyter. (3:1054-1056)

The tone of this passage is nothing if not ambiguous. Hobbes wrote Leviathan in order to impress upon his countrymen the importance of a stable commonwealth; yet he admits freely, and sardonically, that some fruits of commonwealth are not worth eating. In the very act of writing philosophy, he extends his anti-Aristotelian satire to include all philosophers, even modern English ones, even good ones, even himself. Seventeenth-century moral philosophy, he observes in De Cive, “is in the same situation as the public roads, on which all men travel, and some are enjoying a pleasant stroll and others are quarreling, but they make no progress” (5).

In Leviathan, however, Hobbes makes a subtle distinction between “leasure” and “passing of the time,” between time as opportunity and time as burden. The philosophy that arises from the latter state is the “vain philosophy” of the schoolmen, but the former state produces sound moral philosophy and active obedience: “Desire of Knowledge, and Arts of Peace, enclineth men to obey a common Power: For such Desire, containeth a desire of leasure; and consequently protection from some other Power than their own” (2:152). By contrast, bad philosophy leads its adherents to value passive obedience, the great royalist watchword. Aristotelian physics, which posits a substantive difference between body and soul, dissuades citizens “from Obeying the Laws of their Countrey . . . For who will endeavour to obey the Laws, if he expect Obedience to be Powred or Blown into him?” (3:1082). Employed correctly,
leisure results in activity, not passivity. Meanwhile, the vain philosophy that originates in a misuse of time itself produces false accounts of time, such as the scholastic conception of eternity:

For the meaning of Eternity, they will not have it to be an Endlesse Succession of Time; for then they should not be able to render a reason how Gods Will, and Praeordaining of things to come, should not be before his Praescience of the same, as the Efficient Cause before the Effect, or Agent before the Action; nor of many other their bold opinions concerning the Incomprehensible Nature of God. But they will teach us, that Eternity is the Standing still of the Present Time, a Nunc-stans (as the Schools call it;) which neither they, nor any else understand, no more than they would a Hic-stans for an Infinite greatnesse of Place. (3:1084)

This doctrine is repugnant to Hobbes for two reasons: first, because it detaches God from the process of cause and effect, when our very awareness of cause and effect is what leads us to believe in a deity (2:166); second, because it derives not from the human experience of time but from an unprovable hypothesis about God’s unknowable experience of time.

Reading the Latin translation of Leviathan, it is tempting to conclude that Hobbes is using “account of time” merely in its original, chronological sense, the sense with which he would have grown up. But his priorities in Leviathan are directly contrary to those of the Elizabethan chronologers, who seek to base their accounts of time on an array of authorities and not on knowledge derived from worldly experience. For Hobbes, an account or computation of time must also be an account of “decaying sense.” Moreover, Hobbes shares with moralists like de Soto and Brathwaite a concern with the perils and possibilities of leisure time. I believe that when Hobbes uses the phrase “account of Time” in Leviathan and the preface to Gondibert, he is drawing on all three definitions. Indeed, I would go further and declare Leviathan itself an account of time, especially given Hobbes’s own definition of “account.” More thoroughly and originally than most of his contemporaries, Hobbes examines the nature of time and its political, social, and linguistic effects. He is also, I believe, the first philosopher to render a truly
materialist account of time: one based explicitly on the “many stroaks, which our eyes, eares, and other organs receive from externall bodies” (2:28). Built into Hobbes’s very concept of time is a quintessentially Hobbesian optimism disguised as pessimism: time is violence in the process of decay, yet it can after all be turned to good.

3. Found True: History and Truth Operative

Hobbes’s account of time in Leviathan is not only a materialist account but also an explicitly anti-historical account. His definition of “history” in part 1 seems objective enough: “The Register of Knowledge of Fact is called History. Whereof there be two sorts: one called Naturall History; which is the History of such Facts, or Effects of Nature, as have no Dependance on Mans Will; Such as are the Histories of Metalls, Plants, Animals, Regions, and the like. The other, is Civill History; which is the History of the Voluntary Actions of men in Common-wealths” (2:124). This is, however, the first and last time Hobbes mentions “Civill History” without attaching some aspersion to it. Aiming to free his contemporaries from “the authority of an Aristotle, a Cicero, or a Thomas, or any other Doctor whatsoever,” he undermines the study of history at every turn. Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton have shown that many Renaissance readers of history viewed their studies as preludes to political action: “this ‘activity of reading’ commonly envisaged some other outcome of reading beyond accumulation of information; and that envisaged outcome then shaped the relationship between reader and text.”185 According to Hobbes, however, such political readers are simply lying to themselves about the practical utility of history: “And even of those men themselves, that in Councells of the Common-wealth, love to shew their reading of Politiques and History, very few do it in their

185 Jardine and Grafton, “‘Studied for Action’: How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy,” 31.
domestique affaires, where their particular interest is concerned; having Prudence enough for their private affaires: but in publique they study more the reputation of their owne wit, than the successe of anothers businesse” (2:76). Hobbes’s contemporaries objected to his scorn for historical authority: Clarendon observes that “Mr. Hobbes hath so great a prejudice to the reading Histories (as if they were all enemies to his Government) that he will not take the pains carefully to peruse those, from which he expects [i.e. can be expected] to draw some advantage to himself.”

Instead of arguing that his readers should discount history in favor of experience, Hobbes often writes as if the epistemological primacy of experience is already a universally accepted truth. His discussion of religious belief provides a clear example of this tendency. Even in the case of scripture, he argues, “they that believe that which a Prophet relates unto them in the name of God, take the word of the Prophet, do honour to him, and in him trust, and believe, touching the truth of what he relateth, whether he be a true, or a false Prophet.” He extends this neat ambiguity, not quite piety and not quite blasphemy, with a rather flippant example: “And so it is also with all other History. For if I should not believe all that is written by Historians, of the glorious acts of Alexander, or Caesar; I do not think the Ghost of Alexander, or Caesar, had any just cause to be offended; or any body else, but the Historian. If Livy say the Gods made once a Cow speak, and we believe it not; wee distrust not God therein, but Livy” (2:102). This works as a supporting example for his earlier argument only if we accept, first, that scripture is a history like “all other History”; and second, that we should make a policy of approaching historical accounts of great men with skepticism. After all, even the bare facts of the past can be misinterpreted or turned to mischievous ends, making them no more “true” than fiction: “And

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186 Clarendon, A brief view and survey, 145.
therefore whatsoever examples may be drawn out of History, concerning the Election of Pastors, by the People, or by the Clergy, they are no arguments against the Right of any Civill Soveraign, because they that elected them did it by his Authority” (3:852). Or, more concisely, against Cardinal Robert Bellarmine’s defense of ecclesiastical power in his Disputationes: “His sixth, and last Argument, is from Examples. To which I answer, first, that Examples prove nothing” (3:926).

Hobbes is also quick to dismiss any historical episode that incorporates supernatural elements. The “fearfull apparition” that Brutus saw at Philippi, for instance, “is commonly related by Historians as a Vision: but considering the circumstances, one may easily judge [it] to have been but a short Dream” (2:32). Here too, Hobbes links implausible history with religion: “From this ignorance of how to distinguish Dreams, and other strong Fancies, from vision and Sense, did arise the greatest part of the Religion of the Gentiles in time past . . . If this superstitious fear of Spirits were taken away . . . men would be much more fitted than they are for civill Obedience” (2:34). This is a somewhat disjointed sequence of arguments: first, that historians err in attributing Brutus’s vision to supernatural interference and not his own senses; second, that an inclination to believe in spirits gave rise to both pagan religion and modern superstition; third, that “crafty ambitious persons” (2:34) capitalize on the common people’s irrational beliefs in order to incite them to rebellion. But all three of these points issue from a common conviction: that any intellectual system founded on anything but experience will result eventually in disaster. History is so dangerous in part because it is so easily mingled with other brands of belief: one cause of “spirituall darknesse,” Hobbes argues, is the act of blending scripture and Aristotelianism with “false, or uncertain Traditions, and fained, or uncertain History” (3:958).
Superstition may have led the common people into treason, but it is ancient history itself that corrupted their corrupters:

And as Aristotle; so Cicero, and other Writers have grounded their Civill doctrine, on the opinions of the Romans, who were taught to hate Monarchy . . . And by reading of these Greek, and Latine Authors, men from their childhood have gotten a habit (under a false shew of Liberty,) of favouring tumults, and of licentious controlling the actions of their Soveraigns; and again of controlling those controllers, with the effusion of so much blood; as I think I may truly say, there was never any thing so dearly bought, as these Western parts have bought the learning of the Greek and Latine tongues. (2:334)

Hobbes does not doubt the power of history to produce political action in the present; rather, he doubts its ability to produce worthwhile action. Instead of arguing that modern readers should draw different lessons from ancient history, he rejects the possibility that ancient history can teach different lessons (except, perhaps, when Hobbes himself is the student). The Renaissance veneration of such ancients as Aristotle and Cicero leads to both the wrong kind of leisure and the wrong kind of action.

For Hobbes, then, the historical record is a testament to human injustice and wrongheadedness, and little good comes from studying it. His own political philosophy models an alternative version of the past: not what did happen but what should, or might as well, have happened. Leviathan’s very ideological crux, the theory of the covenant between subjects and sovereign, is founded on a pair of historical fictions. “That he which is made Soveraigne maketh no Covenant with his Subjects before-hand, is manifest,” Hobbes declares casually in the second part of Leviathan (2:266). If a monarch holds power, his subjects must take for granted that they gave him that power, even if they cannot point to a historical moment when they did so—and indeed, Hobbes has already argued that sovereign power transcends the lives and deaths of individual sovereigns. In the conclusion to Leviathan, Hobbes stresses the danger that arises when “Conquerors require not onely a Submission of mens actions to them for the future, but
also an Approbation of all their actions past; when there is scarce a Common-wealth in the world, whose beginnings can in conscience be justified” (3:1135). It is not historical knowledge proper that threatens a state, but the sovereign’s desire for the historical record to conform to the dictates of conscience. The stability of a commonwealth is rooted in the still-fictional present and future, not in the historical past. The sovereign’s subjects, for their part, must hold in mind two discrete and possibly contradictory pasts: the factual past, a record of oppression and injustice, and the ideal past, without which the present can never know peace. If “the Right of the Kings of England did depend on the goodnesse of the cause of William the Conquerour, and upon their lineall and directest Descent from him,” Hobbes explains, “. . . there would perhaps be no tie of the Subjects obedience to their Soveraignment at this day in all the world: wherein whilst they needlessly think to justifie themselves, they justifie all the successfull Rebellions that Ambition shall at any time after raise against them, and their Successors” (3:1135). In other words, English monarchs have erred in using the historical record to legitimate their sovereignty, when the only justification they need is their own power. Both sovereign and subjects might as well believe in a past whose events, real or imagined, conduce to political stability instead of civil war.

The second historical fiction proceeds from the first, and involves a concept that we might term “poetic justice,” though the phrase did not enter the English language until the end of the seventeenth century. The commonwealth, embodied in the sovereign, is “a Feigned or Artificiall person” (2:244), the creation of a group of people who desire protection. Thus, rulers

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187 The first author to use the phrase “poetic justice” in print was Charles Gildon, in 1691: “Though ’tis said of Sophocles, and Euripides, that one represented the Accidents of Human Life, without regard to that Poetic Justice, as they too often happen; the other, as they ought to have been.” Gildon, The history of the Athenian Society for the resolving all nice and curious questions (London: printed for James Dowley, 1691), 9. The next use of the phrase in print was also Gildon’s, in his prefatory epistle to Thomas D’Urfey’s comedy The marriage-hater: “[Y]ou have farther observ’d that decorum of Poetick Justice, in making Sir Philip be caught in his own Plot, to deceive another, and marry her, who had so well merited him . . .” D’Urfey, The marriage-hater (London: printed for Richard Bentley, 1692). Clearly, Gildon saw the phrase as applicable to both historical actions and modern manners.
“have their words and actions Owned by those whom they represent” (2:244): the sovereign is the “actor” and the subjects, collectively, are his “author.” This does not mean that a group of individuals banded together at a specific point in the past and consciously created an artificial man; it means that subjects are born into authorship of the power that governs them. Because each subject is always already “Author of all the Actions, and Judgments of the Soveraigne Instituted,” he can do “no injury to any of his Subjects; nor ought he to be by any of them accused of Injustice” (2:270). For Hobbes, the political necessities of the present do not necessarily originate in the historical past. Hence his somewhat chilling defense of state censorship of inflammatory materials: “And though in matter of Doctrine, nothing ought to be regarded but the Truth; yet this is not repugnant to regulating of the same by Peace. For Doctrine repugnant to Peace, can no more be True, than Peace and Concord can be against the Law of Nature” (2:272). The word “true” here seems to signify not factual reality but whatever can be seen to have produced peace. Truth exists in the perfect tense: it can be known only by its effects.

Taken purely as political philosophy, these arguments against historical veracity seem mind-bendingly counterintuitive. But if we put Leviathan in context with Hobbes’s contemporaneous discussion of historical poetry, his blithe dismissal of the historical record makes more sense. While Hobbes was living in Paris, he wrote a prefatory epistle to his fellow exile William Davenant’s heroic poem Gondibert. This letter was a response to Davenant’s much longer preface to Gondibert, and the two prefaces were published together in Paris in 1650 as A Discourse upon Gondibert. (Gondibert itself had yet to appear, which occasioned some mirth among the English exile community in Paris: “You give us a stomach, he gives us no meat. / A
Preface to no Book, a Porch to no house: Here is the Mountain but where is the Mouse?” The modern concept of “creating hype” for a publication was more than three centuries away.) Hobbes tried gamely to praise his friend’s unfinished poem, a tale of a lovelorn Lombard prince, which Davenant envisioned as a hybrid of classical epic and five-act tragedy. In his prefatory epistle, Hobbes congratulates Davenant on “the puritie of your purpose, in having no other motive of your labour, but to adorn Virtue, and procure her Lovers” (127). This bizarre image makes Davenant a pimp to virtue, dressing her in borrowed colors. For Hobbes, however, this is no bad thing: virtue is not naturally appealing to the general reader, and it must be adorned if it is to be sold. For the same reason, the poet is not obliged to honor historical truth: “For as truth is the bound of Historicall, so the Resemblance of truth is the utmost limit of Poeticall Liberty” (135-136).

In his own preface to Gondibert, Davenant carries this sentiment even further:

For why should a Poet doubt in Story to mend the intrigues of Fortune by more delightfull conveyances of probable Fiction, because austere Historians have enter’d into bond to truth? an obligation which were in Poets, as foolish and unnecessary as is the bondage of false Martyrs, who lie in chains for a mistaken opinion: But by this I would imply, that Truth narrative and past, is the Idol of Historians, (who worship a dead thing) and truth operative, and by effects continually alive, is the Mistresse of Poets, who hath not her existence in matter but in reason. (22-23)

One cannot help but wonder if this passage emerged from a conversation between Davenant and Hobbes. Davenant’s mention of “false Martyrs” evokes Hobbes’s own dismissal of most supposed martyrs in Leviathan: “He, that to maintain every doctrine which he himself draweth out of the History of our Saviours life . . . or which he beleeveth upon the authority of a private

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http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7197

man, will oppose the Laws and Authority of the Civill State, is very far from being a Martyr of Christ” (3:788). Davenant’s phrase “false Martyrs” is far more vague than Hobbes’s dangerous argument that no one “can be a Martyr . . . but such as are sent to the conversion of Infidels” and not the conversion of other Christians (3:788); but both texts associate false martyrdom with an overzealous devotion to a certain brand of history. Moreover, Davenant’s concept of “truth operative” is practically identical to Hobbes’s idea of historical “truth” in *Leviathan*. “Truth narrative” produces brute fact; truth operative produces an ideal past that conforms to “reason.” For Davenant, truth operative is the province of poetry; for Hobbes, it is also the province of moral philosophy and good government. Truth narrative is what actually happened; truth operative is what might as well have happened, or what reason dictates should have happened—doubtless an alluring conceit for two political exiles in 1650.

In his theory of “truth operative,” Davenant seems to have been influenced by Philip Sidney, who in *The Defence of Poesie* (1595) argues that “the Historian wanting the precept, is so tied, not to what should be, but to what is, to the particular truth of things, and not to the general reason of things, that his example draweth no necessarie consequence, and therefore a lesse fruitfull doctrine.” Both Sidney and Davenant use reason as their metric for assessing the relative merits of history and poetry. “Reason,” in this context, is not objective fact but whatever produces sound moral “doctrine.” The historical record, as a collection of unadorned and uninterpreted facts, makes little moral sense; thus it is the historian who defies reason and the poet who conforms to it. Sidney, however, distinguishes between “reason” and “the particular truth of things”; Davenant proposes that two kinds of truth exist, one reasonable and the other unreasonable. For Hobbes, truth is reason. He accepts the distinction between “truth narrative”

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and “truth operative,” but gives only the latter the name of truth. Sidney’s category of “the particular truth of things,” i.e. historical fact, has no moral or epistemological application in *Leviathan*. If past events fail to produce what Sidney calls “necessary consequence,” they cannot be true in the Hobbesian sense of the word. Truth is active, not passive; it is not the effect of moral reasoning but the cause of moral actions. Accordingly, Hobbes’s is an ethics of might-as-well: the subject must base his actions not on what actually happened in the past, but what might as well have happened, given the present state of things. What is true is what has been, in Hobbes’s magnificent phrase, “found true” by present necessity. The present determines which parts of the past emerge as “truth.”

Donne died twenty years before the publication of *Leviathan*, but echoes of his *Anniversaries* resound throughout the treatise. Both he and Hobbes extrapolate backward from a precariously stable present to a partly fictional version of the past. For Donne, Elizabeth Drury’s death has detached cause from effect, rendering impossible the fundamental human activity of “measuring future things from things before.” (Note the word “things,” the speaker’s desperate clinging to the material world in the absence of logic.) Measuring past things from things present is equally difficult, for the past is now vacated of all meaning, all significance to the post-apocalyptic world that Drury has left to her survivors. In Augustine’s *Confessions*, past, present, and future collapse into one; the *Anniversaries* estrange past, present, and future utterly from one other in a gruesome dismemberment of time. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes performs a similar operation in order to render a version of history that conforms to what Sidney terms “reason,” Davenant “truth operative,” and Hobbes himself merely “truth.” Though human nature is defined by the ability to reason from cause to effect and from effect to cause, it is also defined by the failure of this reasoning to produce a usable version of the truth. “There is no action of man in this life,”
Hobbes declares at the end of the second part of *Leviathan*, “that is not the beginning of so long a chayn of Consequences, as no humane Providence, is high enough, to give a man a prospect to the end” (2:572). The infinitive phrase after the last comma is a perfect line of iambic pentameter, as if meant to linger like a proverb in the reader’s memory. We can know that our actions will have consequences, but we cannot know what they will be. To be a human subject is necessarily to perceive oneself as an actor within linear time; but that act of perception merely brings home the fact of our blindness. Knowing that the present moment will produce a future is small consolation for our ignorance of what that future will bring.

4. *Behemoth*

Hobbes’s own future brought him a precarious security. After the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, he remained in the household of the earl of Devonshire, traveling with the family between Derbyshire and London. He was also a familiar figure at the morally permissive court of his former student Charles II, to whom he had been reintroduced “by John Aubrey, according to Aubrey,” and from whom he received a yearly allowance.191 Aubrey remembered that “the witts at Court were wont to bayte him. But he feared none of them, and would make his part good. The King would call him the Beare: Here comes the Beare to be bayted . . . He was marvellous happy and ready in his replies, and that without rancor (except provoked)[.]”192 In *Behemoth*, Hobbes himself reflects on court culture in a wry aside worthy of Restoration comedy: “Fine cloaths, great feathers, ciuility towards men that will not swallow iniuries, and iniury to them that will, is the present Gallantry” (157). But a royal pension and a rapport with young courtiers were no guarantees of safety, and Hobbes, now in his seventies, spent the first

decade of the Restoration “convinced that he was at risk of a prosecution for heresy . . . His anxiety was certainly aroused by the introduction of a bill against atheism in the House of Commons in October 1666, and by specific references to *Leviathan* during the proceedings on it.”¹⁹³ Though the bill failed, Hobbes never lost his fear that his enemies among the Restoration bishops and statesmen might come for him at last.

Perhaps from a desire for protection as much as from shared political sympathies, Hobbes associated during the late 1660s and early 1670s with a group of five opposition figures known as the “Cabal,” an acronym of their surnames and titles.¹⁹⁴ The Cabal brought about the downfall and exile of Hobbes’s foe Clarendon, Charles II’s chief minister during the catastrophic Anglo-Dutch War of 1665-1667. They also supported the publication of Andrew Marvell’s *The Rehearsal Transpros’d* (1672-1673), a two-part prose satire on Samuel Parker’s 1670 attack on religious dissenters. Though Hobbes was not directly involved in the political machinations of the Cabal, *Behemoth*, probably written in 1668, is an unambiguous expression of opposition sympathies. In a 1679 letter to his publisher William Crooke, Hobbes recalls that he had “humbly besought” Charles to let him publish *Behemoth* “long ago,” but “his Majesty (though he heard me gratiously, yet he) flatly refused to have it published.”¹⁹⁵ Despite public demand for the dialogue, Hobbes implores Crooke not to publish it: “Rather than to be thought any way to further or countenance the printing, I would be content to lose twenty times the value of what you can expect to gain by it[.]”¹⁹⁶ To Hobbes’s chagrin, a pirated edition of *Behemoth* appeared

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¹⁹⁴ The five statesmen were Thomas Clifford, first Baron Clifford of Chudleigh; Henry Bennet, first Earl of Arlington; George Villiers, second Duke of Buckingham; Anthony Ashley Cooper, first Baron Ashley; and John Maitland, first Duke of Lauderdale.
almost immediately after, but the official edition of *Behemoth* was published in 1681, two years after Hobbes’s death at the age of ninety-one.

Despite his fear of prosecution, Hobbes felt emboldened while writing *Behemoth* to tear away the (albeit flimsy) veil of subterfuge that he had cast over certain passages in *Leviathan*. His discussion of clerical misdeeds in the fourth part of *Leviathan*, for instance, focuses on the tendency of Catholic bishops to usurp secular power from their sovereign. Though he leaves open the possibility that the Anglican clergy might be similarly inclined, he insists that “the Authors . . . of this Darknesse in Religion, are the Romane, and the Presbyterian Clergy” (3:1106). In *Behemoth*, all pretense of loyalty to the Church of England has vanished. “Doe the Clergy in England pretend, as the Pope does, or as the Presbyterians doe to haue a right from God immediately to gouverne the King and his subiects in all points of Religion and Manners?” A asks rhetorically. “If they doe you cannot doubt but that if they had number and strength, which they are like neuer to haue, they would attempt to obtaine that power, as the others haue done” (168). This chilling observation sounds more Miltonic than Hobbesian, and it goes some way toward explaining Hobbes’s reluctance to expose *Behemoth* to public scrutiny. In a remarkably unsubtle moment early in the text, Hobbes makes B marvel that “[h]e were in an ill case then, that aduentured to write or speake in defence of the Ciuill Power, that must be punisht by him whose rights he defended, like Vzza that was slaine, because he would needs vnbidden put forth his hand to keep the Arke from falling” (114). B is supposedly remarking on the excessive power of the Pope in Catholic countries, but it seems clear that Hobbes saw himself as Uzza, a perpetually endangered teller of unpalatable truths.

It is difficult to reconcile Hobbes’s dismissive treatment of historical authority in *Leviathan* with his later decision to write his own history of the Civil War. It seems clear that
Hobbes intended *Behemoth* as a departure from, or improvement upon, the Renaissance tradition of “Civill History”; but B’s description of A’s narrative as a “History not so much of the actions that pass’d in the time of the late troubles, as of their Causes, and of their Councells, and Artifice by which they were brought to passe” (166) does not quite clinch the distinction. Though both ancient and modern historians did treat of military and political “actions,” they also devoted space to political and what we would now call psychological analysis: this was, in fact, what linked “Civill” historians to such classical historians as Tacitus and Polybius and separated them from chronicle historians. Polydore Vergil’s *Anglica historia*, the first comprehensive history of England in the Renaissance humanist tradition, discusses recent political luminaries in an almost Hobbesian fashion: “This abundance of fortune is to be accounte most laudable if it befalls men who are grave, modest, and temperate, who do not boast of their power, nor become insolent in money-matters, and who do not advance themselves in other good things. None of these things was true of Wolsey”—who, it should be noted, imprisoned Vergil in the Tower of London in 1515.\(^\text{197}\) Hobbes was not the first historian to bring a sardonically analytical eye to events in which he himself had been involved.

Nor does *Behemoth* overlook what might be termed “actions”: much of the third and fourth dialogues are taken up with matter-of-fact narration adapted from James Heath’s *Brief Chronicle of the Late Intestine Warr in the Three Kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland* (1662).\(^\text{198}\) According to Seaward, “[m]ost of the other books dealing with the events of the Civil War which had appeared by the early 1660s were . . . compilations of largely undigested material, or very brief and generalized[.]”\(^\text{199}\) In *Behemoth*, Hobbes does for the Civil War


\(^{199}\) Seaward, *Behemoth*, 50.
essentially what Vergil did for English history up to Henry VIII: he brings moral and political analysis to a set of facts derived from bare-bones chronicles. Yet in a letter to Aubrey from August 1679, Hobbes complains that the title page of the pirated edition of *Behemoth* describes the work as a “History” instead of an “Epitome,” a word that implied “a digest, or a condensed version of a larger work.” How, then, can Hobbes presume to establish in *Behemoth* the very authority he undermines in *Leviathan*—if that is in fact what he is doing?

*Behemoth*’s most obvious difference from other early modern histories lies in its unusual form: it is a set of four philosophical dialogues between two men with the aggressively unremarkable names of A and B. A is an older man who relates his experience of the Civil War and its aftermath to B, who is too young to remember “the causes, pretensions, iustice, order, artifice, and euent” (107) of that time. Hobbes’s choice of the dialogue form places *Behemoth* in the tradition of Izaak Walton’s enormously popular crypto-royalist treatise *The Compleat Angler*, first published in 1653 and expanded significantly in subsequent editions. In *The Compleat Angler*, which Walton characterizes as “a recreation, of a recreation,” history is one of many digressions, though the word “digression” loses meaning in a book composed almost entirely of such. Like many midcentury royalists, Walton expresses nostalgia for Elizabethan England, though he couches it in the language of aesthetic appreciation. The fisher Piscator recalls that on his most recent outing, he heard a milkmaid singing “that smooth Song which was made by Kit Marlow, now at least fifty years ago; and the Milk maids mother sung an answer to it, which was made by Sir Walter Raleigh in his yonger dayes. They were old fashioned Poetry, but choicely good, I think much better then that now in fashion in this Critical age” (63-64). In *Behemoth*, by contrast, Hobbes not only casts aspersions on Elizabeth’s reign—“The temper of all the

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201 Izaak Walton, *The compleat angler, or the contemplative man’s recreation* (London: printed by T. Maxey, 1653).
Parliaments since the time of Queen Elisabeth has been the same with the temper of this Parliament, and shall alwaies be such as long as the Presbiterians and men of Democraticall principles have the like influence vpon the Elections” (373)—but also displays little patience for the experiments in expression and evasion that the dialogue form allows Walton.

There is, however, a crucial similarity between Hobbes’s and Walton’s dialogues: the philosophical dialogue is leisure made legible. Ancient and early modern dialogues alike begin with scenes of relaxation, idleness, or conviviality: take the drunken party in Plato’s Symposium, to which Alcibiades, the author of what Hobbes would call “actions,” arrives “extremely drunk and shouting loudly . . . crowned with a thick wreath of ivy and violets and wearing a great many ribbons on his head.”\(^{202}\) The dead “kings and satraps” of Lucian’s Menippean dialogues are reduced to idle bickering and lowly occupations—“selling salt fish . . . or teaching the alphabet”—in the underworld.\(^{203}\) Hobbes reflects in Leviathan that classical philosophy was the pursuit of “those that had no employment, neither at home, nor abroad, [and] had little else to employ themselves in, but (as St. Luke says, Acts 17. 21.) in telling and hearing news, or in discoursing of Philosophy publiquely to the youth of the City” (3:1056). Yet in Behemoth A takes up precisely that mantle. More accustomed to poke fun at literary fiction than to write it, Hobbes makes no attempt to set the scene: we have no idea where the dialogue is taking place, how A and B know each other, or what positions they occupy in society. Stripping away names, occupations, relationships, and scenery, Hobbes leaves us with the bare bones of the dialogue form: two individuals with leisure to converse. In a scene that may betray some wishful thinking,


the aged A scolds B for not staying longer last time, and a contrite B replies, “Nay, I pray you giue me now what you have about you; for the rest I am content you take what time you please” (185).

Leisure defines not only the form of *Behemoth* but also the argument. A traces the English rebellion to seditious preachers and notes “what harme may proceed from a liberty that men have vpon every Sunday and oftner, to Harangue all the people of a nation at one time, while the State is ignorant of what they will say” (189). Preaching would be less of a danger to the public, A argues, if the average man had the leisure to absorb “[t]he rules of *Just* and *Uniust* sufficiently demonstrated, and from Principles euident to the meanest capacity” (158) from other sources. But social circumstances in the 1640s prevented this:

> [M]any cannot read, many though they can, haue no leisure, and of them that haue leisure the greatest part haue their minds wholly employed, and taken up by their priuate busineses or pleasures. So that it is impossible that the multitude should ever learne their duty but from the Pulpit, and vpon Holy-days. But then and from thence, it is, that they learned their disobedience. (159)

Citing “the quite sharp attack upon popular customs, sports, and holidays which was made in the last years of the eighteenth century and the first years of the nineteenth,” E. P. Thompson argues that industrialization in England produced a widespread concern over how laborers spent their leisure hours.\(^\text{204}\) However, a form of this cultural anxiety was present as early as the 1630s, when Charles I reintroduced the Book of Sports (first issued in 1617 by his father James I), which compelled clergymen to allow their parishioners certain recreations on Sunday after church. The new law, a calculated assault on the Puritans’ strict observation of the Sabbath, increased Puritan hostility toward Charles and the Laudian church government.

In the seventeenth century, however, it was not only commoners who drew criticism for misspending their free time. In his character book *The Gentile Sinner*, written in the late 1650s, the young royalist clergyman Clement Ellis laments that “we have all along sported our selves in our own Miseries.” Ellis’s “gentile sinner,” a Restoration rake *avant la lettre*, is a nobleman who neglects politics and religion in favor of frivolous distractions: “How rarely are the men to be met with, who indeed have a real sense of any thing, but their Meat, their Drink, their Apparell, and their Game!” Ellis heaps scorn on the wealthy university student who learns only “To curse his Tutor by the name of Baal's Priest, and to sell more books in halfe an Houre then he had bought him in a yeare” (27); but for Hobbes, the universities are yet another abuse of leisure time, another empty pleasure. “The Vniversities haue been to this Nation, as the wooden horse to the Troianes,” A complains (159). By introducing their incomprehensible Aristotelian jargon into English cultural discourse, the schoolmen and clergy have distracted educated people from the most pressing concerns of their nation, and that distraction has filtered down to the common people.

In both *Behemoth* and *Leviathan*, Hobbes contends that the philosophical doctrine most responsible for the Civil War is the Aristotelian concept of separated essences, the opposite of materialism:

*B. What are Separated Essences?*
* A. Separated beings.
* B. Separated from what?
* A. From euery thing that *is*. (162)

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes had objected to the Aristotelian reliance on words derived from “to be” (*esse*), such as “*Entity, Essence, Essential, Essentiality*” (3:1080). If a language lacked that verb, Hobbes argues, “the men that used it would not a jot the less capable of Inferring, Concluding,

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205 Clement Ellis. *The gentile sinner, or, Englands brave gentleman characterized in a letter to a friend both as he is and as he should be* (Oxford: printed by Henry Hall for Edward and John Forrest, 1660), 88.
and of all kind of Reasoning, than were the Greeks and Latines” (3:1080). *Esse* has no substance or meaning in itself, for language could function with the mere implication of it and not the word as such. But on this insubstantial verb, the Aristotelians have built an entire epistemological structure. For A, the Aristotelian idea that the world derives its form and motion from immaterial essences leads to the idea “that there be many things that come to passe in this world from no *necessity* of causes, but mere *contingency, casualty* and *fortune*” (162-163). B reflects that “in this [the schoolmen] make God stand idle, and to be a meer spectator of the games of Fortune” (163): in other words, they produce yet another false account of time, one that divorces God from cause and effect and enlarges clerical authority over divine authority. The more attention the public pays to such metaphysical conceits as “separated essences,” the less attention it pays to its immediate material situation. Hobbes accordingly never misses an attempt to deflate the abstractions of Aristotelianism and Catholicism, noting, for instance, that the “prohibition of Marriage to Priests came in about the time of Pope *Gregory the seuenth*, and *William the first*, King of England; by which meanes the Pope had in England, what with Secular and what with Regular Priests, a great many lusty Batchelors at his seruice” (124-125).

In contrast to scholastic accounts of time, *Behemoth* begins with the arrestingly physical image of time that we encountered earlier:

> If in time as in place there were degrees of *high* and *low*, I verily beleue that the highest of time would be that which passed between the years of 1640 and 1660. For he that thence, as from the diuells mountain, should have looked vpon the world, and obserued the actions of men, especially in England, might have had a prospect of all kinds of *Iniustice*, and of all kinds of *Folly* that the world could afford, and how they were produced by their dams *hypocrisy* and *self-conceit*; whereof the one is double iniquity, and the other double folly. (107)

A’s image of the hill of time evokes a slightly earlier era of chronology, in which time was represented by various graphic devices: timelines, human figures, and even maps. If A were to
map the course of human history, his image would be topographical, with hills and mountains indicating especially significant eras. But A does not consider the years between 1640 and 1660 significant because so many actions were performed within them; instead, they are “the highest of time” because they afforded a prospect of the causes of those actions. In Hobbes’s view, human nature is defined by a mixture of knowledge and ignorance: the knowledge that causes and effects exist (i.e. that time contains more than the present moment), and the ignorance of the exact relationship between those causes and effects. According to A, studying the years of the civil war and interregnum can go some way toward mitigating that ignorance, because of the view of human nature that the period provides. Some eras, it would seem, produce more truth operative than others.

The concept of truth operative, or of history “found true,” presumes that the present has an active role in shaping the topography of the past. Leisure does not equal passivity for Hobbes, and he reserves a good deal of scorn for the doctrine of passive obedience (commonly known as “temporizing”), which he portrays as a contradiction in terms: “Every law is a command to do, or to forbear: neither of these is fulfilled by suffering [i.e. biding one’s time under an uncongenial government]. If any suffering can be called obedience, it must be such as is voluntary; for no involuntary action can be counted a submission to the law” (171). At first glance, Hobbes’s disdain for passive obedience would seem to contradict his fundamental political position: that the subjects of a sovereign never have the right to rebel, even when they believe that the sovereign has transgressed God’s laws. A declares that the very clergy who preached passive obedience to the people incited them to active disobedience, which confuses B: “What is there in this to giue colour to the late Rebellion?” (171). A explains that passive obedience is appealing in theory but opposed to human nature in practice: “He that means that his suffering should be
taken for obedience, must not onely not resist, but also flie, nor hide himself to avoid his
punishment. And who is there among them that discourse thus of \textit{passiue obedience}, when his
life is in extreme danger that will voluntarily present himselfe to the Officers of Justice?” (173).
Self-preservation is the first law of nature, and a political doctrine that commands subjects to
transgress that law is doomed to failure. Passive obedience, like any concept predicated on the
denial of some aspect of human nature, can never amount to more than hypocrisy.

This argument, like many of Hobbes’s arguments, seems to have enraged his
contemporaries. An anonymous seventeenth-century reader of the unauthorized 1679 edition of
\textit{Behemoth} notes his frustration on the endpaper of the book: “Mr. Hobs obscur’s the Doct: of
Passive obedience, and most odly (as he doth of other things) treats of it.”\textsuperscript{206} The reader seems to
believe that the doctrine is more effective in protecting against rebellion than Hobbes would allow:

There are 2 Tables belonging to Every perfect & regular Government. One which
concerns the Majesty of the Sov[e]r[eign]: Gds Vicegerent, w[hich] is the first Table. And another which concerns the Good & Safty of the People. the 2d. and these two
together are the compleat & adequate rule both of active, & Passive obedience which is the
patient bearing of the greatest injuries. Now if th’Imperiall law or law of the
Soveraigne, which is the 1\textsuperscript{st} Table, do crosse or go contrary to the Political law which is
the 2d Table which concerns the good & Safty of the People. Then it is our duty to
submitt to the law of the first, which absolutely forbids us to resist or take up the Sw[ord]
against the Soveraign.

The reader also resents Hobbes’s emphasis on the “Political law” at the expense of moral law,
for the laws of the kingdom allow the subject many transgressions that the Bible forbids: “He
may write seditious books, burlesque the Doctrine of the Crosse, Slander th’Ancient Xtians,
falsify good Authors, inure those who never did him hurt, & yet transgresse no Humane Law.
For the Law hath the Civil, & not the Xtian Capacity of the Man, for its Obiect.” By discussing

\textsuperscript{206} MS notes in Folger H2239 Bd.w. M2838 copy 2, transcribed 17 Dec. 2014.
only the civil law, Hobbes teaches his readers “how far they may be troublesome & vexatious to their superiors without transgressing the Law . . . which is a sure & certain way to Hell.” The reader is correct to identify a certain obscurity and oddness in Hobbes’s treatment of passive obedience. Ultimately, however, he misses the point: Hobbes is arguing not that passive obedience is wrong in principle, but that it will always fail in practice because it defies the most fundamental impulses of human nature. Hobbes is never anything but realistic about humanity’s moral and intellectual capacities, and in *Behemoth* he asserts that passive obedience lies outside both capacities.

Passive obedience, or temporizing, is predicated on the idea that time and the times are out of one’s control. *Far from withholding himself from the flow of historical action, he passively endorses every new action, regardless of whether it corresponds with what came before. He is, in short, the enemy of truth operative. Hobbes, by contrast, believes that responsibly existing in time means performing repeated acts of discernment and reconstruction. These are conscious versions of the acts of discernment and reconstruction that we perform simply by existing: imagination and memory, after all, are “nothing but decaying sense.” But decaying sense can take us only so far in learning from the past or foretelling the future. In *Behemoth*, A recalls the proliferation of republican and nonconformist prophecies in the 1640s: “You know there is nothing that renders humane Councells difficult but the incertainty of future time, nor that so well directs men in their deliberations as the foresight of the sequells of their actions, Prophecy being many times the principall cause of the euent foretold.” This is another, more harmful version of truth operative: instead of constructing a usable past from present circumstances, prophets determine the future by predicting it, and we heed their predictions because we are painfully aware of our own limitations.
Perhaps the crucial difference between *Behemoth* and other political histories is Hobbes’s brutal honesty: he doubts profoundly that we can learn from the past, and he is never other than frank about his doubts. His decision to write *Behemoth* in dialogue form introduces a measure of epistemological uncertainty: A speaks from personal experience, but in so doing, he sets himself up as the very authority that he urges B to discount, and so we bear witness to a private citizen’s construction of his own authority. “Nor have we anything to conjecture by,” A says of Parliament’s claim to ancient power, “but the Records of our own Nation, and some small and obscure fragments of Roman Histories. And for the Records, seeing they are of things done onely, sometimes iustly, sometimes vniustly, you can neuer by them know what Right they had, but only what Right they pretended” (206). Yet *Behemoth* itself relies on Heath’s “Records” of the Civil War, and Hobbes’s theory of the social contract in *Leviathan* is based on a “pretended” royal right. Far from asserting absolute intellectual authority, Hobbes continually implicates himself in his own criticism of both historians and philosophers. The great tragedy that emerges from both *Behemoth* and *Leviathan* is that human beings, the only animals capable of temporal perception, know the importance of both the future and the past but can rarely predict the one or derive meaning from the other. “If you thinke the late miseries haue made them wiser,” A laments, “that will quickly be forgot, and then we shall be no wiser than we were” (158).
Chapter Three: Fragmentary Time

Nay, good master, why should not you write your own commentaries as well as Caesar?

—George Etherege, The Man of Mode

1. Against Antiquity

With characteristic perversity, Thomas Browne begins his antiquarian treatise *Hydriotaphia, or Urne-Buriall* (1658) by challenging one of the fundamental principles of seventeenth-century antiquarianism: that the ancient world could provide coherent and practical examples for the present.²⁰⁷ “We have enough to do to make up our selves from present and passed times,” Browne reflects in a prefatory epistle addressed to his friend Thomas le Gros, “and the whole stage of things scarce serveth for our instruction. A compleat peece of vertue must be made up from the Centos of all ages, as all the beauties of Greece could make but one handsome Venus” (A3r-v).²⁰⁸ This arch observation simultaneously holds open and forecloses the possibility of learning from the ancients. Another past might impart wisdom to another present, Browne suggests, but our past is too fragmented to teach and our present too degraded to learn. In both style and content, *Hydriotaphia* itself constitutes a kind of cento, a patchwork of historical episodes, anthropological musings, political allusions, and baroque descriptions of idols and jewels. The overall effect is one of incoherence and disintegration, a verbal illustration not only of the urns discovered in “a Field of old Walsingham” (14), but also of the futility of modern Britain’s efforts to absorb usable lessons from “[v]ain ashes, which in the oblivion of names, persons, times, and sexes, have found unto themselves, a fruitlesse continuation, and only

²⁰⁷ I presented portions of this chapter at the Renaissance Society of America (RSA) conference in Boston in April 2016.
arise unto late posterity, as Emblemes of mortall vanities” (72). Ultimately, the inhabitants of the urns embody nothing but the time that has elapsed since their interment, and modern Englishmen cannot interact with them except ignobly: “we mercifully preserve their bones, and pisse not upon their ashes” (A4r). However, Browne also expresses skepticism toward the veneration of dead persons whose identities and actions have passed down to posterity: “Who knows whether the best of men be known? or whether there be not more remarkable persons forgot, then any that stand remembred in the known account of time?” (76). Like Hobbes, Browne constructs an alternative “account of time” that contests instead of confirming the glory of the past.

By 1658, British antiquarianism had enjoyed several decades of increasing prestige. In the first half of the century, the field “developed from being a diversion of a few learned scholars, mainly lawyers and heralds, to the common pursuit of a large number of gentlemen scattered all over the British Isles.”

Elizabethan and Jacobean antiquaries made clear that Britain, no less than Greece or Rome, could claim an ancient past worthy of excavation and careful study. They also took care to connect their discipline to the grand abstractions of humanist history, a strategy that contributed significantly to antiquarianism’s rising respectability. “It may sound anachronistic to attribute a concern with ‘total history’ to early modern scholars,” writes Peter Burke, “but their aim was indeed a reconstruction of the past out of surviving fragments, a restoration, in the words of the numismatist-diplomat Ezechiel Spanheim, of ‘the wholeness of history’ (historiae integritatem).” William Camden’s oft-reprinted Britannia, first published in Latin in 1586, was not only a geographical survey of the British Isles but also an attempt to “identify the contours of Britain’s political geography because

in framing the narrative of *Britannia* [Camden] sought to devise a way of mirroring Britain’s national origins.”\(^{211}\) In the preface to the posthumously printed 1637 edition of *Britannia*, Camden corroborates this interpretation, recalling that the mapmaker Abraham Ortelius “dealt earnestly with me that I would illustrate this Ile of *BRITAINE*, or (as he said) that I would restore antiquity to Britaine, and Britaine to his antiquity; which was, as I understood, that I would renew ancientrie, enlighten obscuritie, cleare doubts, and recall home Veritie by way of recovery[.]”\(^{212}\) Likewise, the very title of Richard Verstegan’s *A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence* (1605) emphasizes content over form: it is not the antiquities that are decayed but the information or “intelligence” that they contain. Verstegan explains that his project originated from “the very naturall affection which generally is in all men to heare of the woorthynesse of their ance[s]ters, which they should in deed be as desyrous to imitate, as delighted to vnderstand.”\(^{213}\) Antiquaries like Camden and Verstegan thus presented their work as a natural outgrowth of humanist historiography, a means of establishing even stronger connections between past and present.

However, antiquarianism in England also attracted skepticism and satire. A whiff of idolatry, even popery, hung over the enterprise well into the seventeenth century. “I wonder, as there is an Order for the extirpation of Papists out of this Land,” wrote Thomas Flatman in 1658, “that Antiquarians are not inserted amongst that Roman zealous crew; for they are both sinners of the same stock, (viz.) Worshippers of Graven-Images; and without equivocation, breakers of


the second Commandement." Browne himself expresses a similar sentiment in the authorized edition of Religio Medici (1643), but in reverse: he shows “little devotion unto reliques” because of his “doubtfull respect . . . unto Antiquities” (65). Little suspecting that he would write an antiquarian treatise two decades later, Browne likens ancient artifacts to “consecrated swords and roses” and the supposed “ashes of John the Baptist” (65). Such comparisons were not entirely baseless: Verstegan, for instance, was an Antwerp-based recusant who worked as a spy for the English mission on the Continent. Moreover, antiquarian projects often focused on pagan idol worship, which Jonathan Sheehan argues had the eventual effect of “assimilat[ing] idolatry into the heart of religion[.]” Critics of antiquarianism scoffed at its self-association with historiography and characterized the typical antiquary as “a curious Critick in old Coins, Stones and Inscriptions, in Worm-eaten Records, and ancient Manuscripts; also one that affects and blindly doats, on Relicks, Ruins, old Customs, Phrases and Fashions.” In these depictions, antiquaries fail to distinguish between the usable parts of the past and its unassimilable scraps.

Even when not practiced by Catholics, antiquarianism struck some observers as politically subversive. Camden’s student Sir Robert Cotton found his loyalty to the crown called into question in 1627, when a pirated copy of his tract A Short View of the Long Life and Reign of King Henry III reached the attention of Charles I. The Duke of Buckingham, interpreting the work as a thinly veiled attack on his own influence over two successive kings, ordered Cotton’s

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214 Thomas Flatman, Naps upon Parnassus, F3r.
215 Thomas Browne, A true and full copy of that which was most imperfectly and surreptitiously printed before vnder the name of Religio medici (London: printed for Andrew Crook, 1643). Digby would not have encountered this passage, as it is absent from the unauthorized edition of 1642.
library closed. (Shackerley Marmion dramatized this episode in his comedy The Antiquary, written several years later and printed in 1641.) During the interregnum, English antiquarianism became largely the province of royalists, for whom the project of restoring antiquity symbolized the possibility of another restoration. “Such men were commonly excluded from public affairs, and concentrated their attention on their estates and families,” writes Parry. “The study of antiquities became fashionable: it could be patriotic and non-polemical. . . . All [antiquarian studies] had one feature in common: they had a strong nationalist theme, dwelling on the depth and richness of the British past.” Of course, a patriotic royalist was not a patriotic citizen of the Commonwealth, and even if royalist antiquarianism partook of the quietism of the 1650s, it still existed in opposition to the republican government. Piscator, the eponymous fisher of Izaak Walton’s royalist treatise The Compleat Angler (1653), insists that angling is an “Ancient and laudable Art” (9), and that “if this Antiquitie of Angling . . . shall, like an ancient Familie, be either an honour, or an ornament to this vertuous Art which I both love and practise, I shall be the gladder that I made an accidental mention of it” (13-14). For royalists, justifying any practice with reference to its “antiquity” implied rejection of innovation, particularly political innovation.

Hydriotaphia has been interpreted as a quietist work in the vein of The Compleat Angler, participating in “a particular strain of contemporary royalist ‘survivalist’ literature, a strain that was so widespread, and so recognizable, that by marshalling its tropes Browne was sending unmistakable signals about his political position.” Yet Browne’s engagement with royalist antiquarianism in Hydriotaphia is more complex and equivocal than this account would suggest. Entered into the Stationers’ Register six months before Oliver Cromwell’s death, Hydriotaphia

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certainly leaves little doubt as to Browne’s political loyalties. Browne alludes to efforts to “erect a new Britannia” (A3v); to an ancient king rescued from obscurity in France, “restoring unto the world” the treasures of his tomb (23); and to the “Christians which deck their Coffins with Bays” in the hope that “he seeming dead, will restore it self from the root, and its dry and exuccous leaves resume their verdure again” (56). However, far from deploying the urns as “potential symbols of royalist survival,” Browne chooses to emphasize their irrelevance to seventeenth-century England. Five decades before, Verstegan had argued that “Englishmen cannot but from Saxon originall deryue their descent and offspring, and can lack no honor to be descended of such an honorable race, and therefore are the more in honor obliged to know and acknowlege such their own honorable and true descent” (B1r). Taking for granted the Saxon lineage of the modern English, and believing incorrectly that the urns are Roman and not Saxon, Browne warns against patriotic identification with the ashes: “When the bones of King Arthur were digged up, the old Race might think, they beheld therein some Originals of themselves; Unto these of our Urnes none here can pretend relation, and can only behold the Reliques of those persons, who in their life giving the Law unto their predecessors, after long obscurity, now lye at their mercies” (A4r). Browne thus establishes the urns as pathetic remnants of a vanished colonial power, not potential sources of English national sentiment. Brent Nelson argues that Hydriotaphia “rhetorically and experientially involves its audience in the act of reading, agitating and wearying the reader with vain attempts at deriving any meaning from these dead remains, thereby preparing them to seek relief by accepting the devotional alternative of faith

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221 Hydriotaphia was entered into the Stationers’ Register on March 9, 1658; Cromwell died on September 3. See G. E. B. Eyre and G. R. Rivington, eds., A Transcript of the Registers of the Worshipful Company of Stationers; From 1640-1705 A.D., vol. II (London: privately printed, 1913), 168.

and rest in the providence of God.” This rhetorical method works politically as well as devotionally, reminding the reader that the materials of a “new Britannia” cannot be scavenged from the ruins of the old.

When Browne does employ unmistakably royalist tropes, he takes pains to forestall straightforward allegorical readings. Eight pages after describing the “Trees perpetually verdant” that will “restore [themselves] from the root,” Browne takes up the motif of early Christian martyrdom. To most of Browne’s contemporaries, no matter their political position, this reference would have evoked the regicide of nine years before and the hagiographies that appeared after Charles’s beheading. The bestselling Eikon Basilike (1649), supposedly authored by Charles himself shortly before his death, was the most instrumental of these texts in constructing the image of the late king as a martyr. The narrator of Eikon Basilike proposes that “I may (without vanity) turne the reproach of My sufferings, as to the worlds censure, into the honour of a kind of Martyrdome, as to the testimony of My owne Conscience” (239). Given the close relationship in the English popular imagination between monarchy and martyrdom, it is unlikely that a royalist allegory in 1658 would have contained the following reflection:

Nor can we extenuate the valour of ancient Martyrs, who contemned death in the uncomfortable scene of their lives, and in their decrepit Martyrdomes did probably lose not many moneths of their dayes, or parted with life when it was scarce worth the living. . . . But the contempt of death from corporall animosity, promoteth not our felicity. They may set in the Orchestra, and noblest Seats of Heaven, who have held up shaking hands in the fire, and humanely contended for glory. (65)

On one level, this passage has nothing to do with Charles: raised in splendor and executed at the age of forty-eight, he hardly suffered a “decrepit martyrdom.” On another level, it has everything to do with Charles: his fugitive last years could well be interpreted, especially at the time, as an

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223 Brent Nelson, “Curious Readers and Meditative Form in Thomas Browne’s Urne-Buriall,” in Murphy and Todd, New Contexts for Thomas Browne, 111.
224 Charles I, Eikon basilike, The pourtraicture of His Sacred Majestie in his solitudes and sufferings (London: dated 1648), 239.
“uncomfortable scene” that rendered his life “scarce worth the living.” But the passage operates on another level still. As the reader shuttles between these two possibilities, she becomes aware of the perils—the slippages, misunderstandings, and inaccuracies—inherent in reading the past through the present or the present through the past. Nicholas Popper argues that early modern historians and antiquaries saw their task as “establishing a single, certain vision of the past that could then be used to resolve the striations of the present.”

In *Hydriotaphia*, Browne dedicates himself to banishing that vision.

The structure of *Hydriotaphia* reinforces Browne’s polemical goals. The Walsingham urns, like the “she” of the *Anniversaries*, function less as a literary subject than as a rhetorical pretext. Skipping continually between centuries and nations, Browne forsakes antiquarian method in order to evoke a past as jumbled as the contents of the urns. *Hydriotaphia* comprises five chapters, a number that is no coincidence: in *The Garden of Cyrus*, printed in the same volume, Browne argues for the natural, historical, and metaphysical significance of the quincunx (five points arranged in a cross or χ shape). Like *Hydriotaphia*, *Cyrus* brushes aside distinctions of time, place, and species, locating the quincunx not only in the design of the titular Persian garden but also in “the Winter stalk of the Walnut” (142), “the figures of Isis and Osiris” (148), and “the Lungs of great Fishes” (151). In one characteristic passage, Browne blithely conflates the animal, vegetable, and biblical: “The *Arbustetum* or Thicket on the head of the Tea[s]ell, may be observed in this order: And he that considereth that fabrick so regularly palisadoed, and stemm’d with flowers of the royall colour; in the house of the solitary maggot, may finde the Seraglio of Solomon” (124). Within the text, the ubiquity of the quincunx preempts all other systems of order: Browne pointedly devotes as much attention to obscure as exalted topics,

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marveling “how the needle of nature delighteth to work, even in low and doubtful vegetations” (124). If the two treatises “are meant to present a microcosmic image of the natural and supernatural orders and of man’s place within them,” they do so wholly at the expense of man. Frank L. Huntley argues that the joint publication of *Hydriotaphia* and *The Garden of Cyrus* was no accident: “The first essay treats of time; the second, space. And together these two concepts delineate the mind of God, in that time is an image of his Eternity, whereas number and geometrical figures in space (as in the *Timaeus*) are a key to his Unity.” In *Cyrus*, Browne’s focus on the quincunx as the governing principle of physical systems allows him to construct a narrative that refuses to prioritize one form of earthly life over another—the same refusal that characterizes *Hydriotaphia*.

The five chapters of *Hydriotaphia* are organized loosely by subject. The first chapter surveys the burial rites of various cultures past and present, from the Jews, Romans, and Chaldeans to “the Persees now in India, which expose their bodies unto Vultures” (7) and “the Chinois” who “plant a Pine-tree by their grave, and burn great numbers of printed draughts of slaves and horses over it” (9). Chapter 2 introduces the Norfolk urns, unearthed “not many moneths past” (14), and describes their appearance and contents. Conjecturing that “these were the Vrnes of Romanes from the common custome and place where they were found” (15), Browne devotes several pages to the Roman colonization of Britain and the usual burial practices of Roman settlers. In Chapter 3, Browne oscillates between the Walsingham urns and the sepulchers and funerary inscriptions of other nations and cultures. Drawing on his medical expertise, he explains “[h]ow the bulk of a man should sink into so few pounds of bones and

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ashes” (43) and laments the practice of robbing graves for talismans and relics. In the fourth chapter, Browne turns to doctrines of the soul and the afterlife, contending that “[m]en have lost their reason in nothing so much as their religion, wherein stones and clouts make Martyrs” (55). He concludes by reflecting that a man would sink into melancholy if he could not believe “that there is no further state to come, unto which this seems progressionall, and otherwise made in vaine” (67). The fifth and final chapter concerns the human desire for remembrance by posterity, and specifically the futility of that desire: “Time hath spared the Epitaph of Adrians horse, confounded that of himself” (76). Browne notes the central irony of the Walsingham discovery: that “we hope to be known by open and visible conservatories, when to be unknown was the means of their continuation and obscurity their protection” (69). Arguing that time has nearly reached its end—“one face of Janus holds no proportion to the other”—Browne concludes that “[t]is too late to be ambitious” (73), and that Christians should place more hope in the afterlife of their souls than of their reputations.

Yet Hydriotaphia struggles against this structure; it is as disordered on the granular level as the relics it describes. Like Flatman’s antiquary, who “confines a Cluster of Ages into the narrow Compass of his own” (F3v), Browne crams paragraphs and even sentences with multiple religions, species, cultures, and eras. We encounter Democritus, Plato, Judas, and Tiberius in the space of a single page (37). Nor does Browne always discriminate by ontological status: he mentions the ashes of Domitian and Achilles in the same sentence (38). Browne thus flouts the antiquarian method that Popper elucidates: “Whether text or object, each source was subjected to minute parsing, reduced to shards of evidence that were then recombined in an overarching narrative reconstituted by, and accounting for, each fragment.”228 By ostentatiously abandoning

228 Popper, Walter Ralegh’s History of the World, 4.
narrative coherence, Browne shows the reader just how artificial it is, how unnaturally imposed on a fragmentary past that would rather not communicate with us at all. Time works against historical method, erasing the characteristics by which the living might prioritize one skeleton or statue over another. “If they fell by long and aged decay,” writes Browne of the people interred in the urns, “yet wrapt up in the bundle of time, they fall into indistinction, and make but one blot with Infants” (70). In *Hydriotaphia*, time is parasitic: it enters artifacts, devours their meaning, and leaves behind nothing but remnants of itself.

### 2. The Physician and the Pirate

The odd materiality of Browne’s prose was evident to at least one of his contemporaries: the adventurer, courtier, natural philosopher, and recusant Sir Kenelm Digby, whose *Observations upon Religio Medici* (1643), an epistolary essay addressed to Edward Sackville, fourth Earl of Dorset, offers an extended critique of Browne’s first printed work. Writing from house arrest in Southwark, Digby thanks Sackville for “taking so farre into your care the expending of my time during the tediousnesse of my restraint, as to recommend to my reading a Booke, that had received the honour and safeguard of your approbation” (2).²²⁹ This book was Browne’s autobiographical treatise *Religio Medici*, which had been printed in a pirated edition the previous year. Having finished the book, Digby feels obliged to render Sackville a full account of his reactions: “To returne onely a generall commendations of this curious peece, or at large to admire the authors Spirit and smartnes, were too perfunctory an accompt, and too slight a one” (4). With the faintly dismissive epithet “curious peece,” Digby gestures to the ornate, lapidary quality of Browne’s prose, suggesting that his style is more noteworthy than his ideas.

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Digby himself had dabbled in antiquarianism, buying ancient manuscripts and other curiosities during his travels in Europe, and here he signals his intent to treat *Religio Medici* as an *objet* worthy of a wonder cabinet. Later in the treatise, Digby returns to Browne’s “smartness,” a word that at the time connoted glibness: “Most assuredly his wit and smartenesse in this discourse is of the finest *Standard*; and his insight into severer *Learning* will appeare as piercing unto such as use not strictly the touchstone and the *Test* to examine every peece of the glittering coine hee payeth his Reader with” (77). Now Browne is not only a vendor of antiquities but a dealer of flashy forgeries, his “glittering” style distracting the reader from his facile treatment of philosophy.

*Religio Medici* is fundamentally a statement of moderation and religious toleration, a plea for sympathy and cordiality across confessional divides. Asserting that “I borrow not the rules of my Religion from *Rome* or *Geneva*, but the dictates of my own reason” (7), Browne laments the fevered religious rhetoric of his era and argues that “affection, faith, and reason” form “a kind of Triumvirate, or triple government of three competitors, which distract the peace of this our Common-wealth” (36).²³⁰ However, Browne also peppers his treatise with personal details, some of them decidedly bizarre and apparently unrelated to religion: for instance, that he “could wish that we mi**ght procreate like trees . . . I speak not in prejudice, nor am averse from that sweete sexe, but naturally amorous of all that is beautifull; I can looke a whole day with delight upon a handsome picture, though it be but of an Horse” (139-140). For Digby, the chief flaw of *Religio Medici* is Browne’s habit of yoking together public and private, abstract and material, holy and base. Though Digby objects to many of Browne’s theological arguments, he does so largely on grounds of taste: “In his concluding *Prayer*, wherein he summeth up all he wisheth; me thinketh

his arrow is not winged with that fire which I should have expected from him upon this occasion” (115). Any close reader of Browne must decide whether to treat his style separately from his subject matter or to assume that stylistic effect is an integral part of his substance. In the opening pages of Observations, Digby sets out on the first course, distinguishing Browne’s “Spirit and smartnes” from his "strong parts and . . . vigorous brayne” (24). But by the end of his remarks Digby has strayed, as most readers cannot help but do, into the second path: “And where he speaketh of Cupid, and of Beauty, it is in such a phrase, as putteth mee in mind of the Learned Greeke Reader in Cambridge his courting of his Mistris out of Stephens his Thesaurus” (112).

In Digby’s view, the materiality of Browne’s prose participates in a more general unwillingness, or even inability, to abstract the metaphysical from the physical. Throughout Religio Medici, Browne proceeds upward from sensory evidence to theological speculation, but never in the other direction: “Those strange and mysticall transmigrations that I have observed in Silkwormes, turned my Philosophy into Divinity” (76). Objecting to Browne’s apparent belief that the soul “sleepe[s] in the grave till the Resurrection of the body” (12), Digby speculates, with a measure of snobbery, that Browne’s profession has turned him into a materialist:

Much lesse can it be expected that an excellent Physitian whose fancy is always fraught with the materiall drugs that hee prescribeth his Apothecary to compound his Medicines of; and whose hands are inured to the cutting up, & es to the inspection of anatomised bodies; should easily, and with success, flye his thoughts at so towring a Game, as a pure intellect, a Separated and unbodyed Soule[.] (9-10)

Digby conjectures that the stubborn physicality of Browne’s imagination also affects his theories of time and eternity. Browne seems to view eternity as “an infinite extension of time, and a never ending revolution of continuall succession: which is no more like Eternity, then a grosse body is like to a pure Spirit” (16). Digby’s articulation of the relationship between time and eternity
resembles Plato’s in *Timaeus*, in which time is “a moving image of eternity” but has no essential relationship to it.231

Digby also disapproves of Browne’s assertion that “every Essence, created or uncreated, hath some final cause . . . This is the cause I grope after in the workes of Nature” (23). In *Leviathan*, Hobbes would contend that a language that lacked the verb “to be” (*esse*) and its derivatives, “*Entity, Essence, Essential, Essentiality*,” would leave its speakers “not a jot the less capable of Inferring, Concluding, and of all kind of Reasoning, than were the Greeks and Latines” (3:1080).232 Browne displays a similar skepticism toward “essence,” that most abstract and Aristotelian of terms, bringing it abruptly to earth with the rude verb “grop[e].” Browne’s “grop[ing] after” final causes suggests that his search is an inherently physical, even physically transgressive, one, and Digby cannot brook that suggestion: “the notions of matter, forme, act, power, existence, and the like, that are with truth considered by the understanding, and have there each of them a distinct entity, are never the lesse, no where by themselves in nature” (22). Digby would no doubt have concurred with Samuel Johnson’s opinion of Browne’s prose: “His style is, indeed, a tissue of many languages; a mixture of heterogeneous words, brought together from distant regions, with terms originally appropriated to one art, and drawn by violence into the service of another.”233

Even when not discussing the natural world, Browne applies the vocabulary of objects, materials, and substances to other fields of knowledge. In another passage to which Digby takes exception, Browne fantasizes about a synthesis of all earthly knowledge:

I have heard some with deep sighs lament the lost lines of *Cicero*; others with as many groans deplore the combustion of the Library of *Alexandria*; for my part I think there be too many in the world and could with patience behold the urne and ashes of the *Vatican*, could I, with a few others, recover the perished leaves of *Solomon*. . . . It is not a melancholy *Utinam* of mine own, but the desires of better heads, that there were a generall Synod; not to unite the incompatible difference of Religion, but, for the benefit of learning, to reduce it as it lay at first in a few and solid Authours; and to condemn to the fire those swarmes and millions of *Rapsodies*, begotten only to distract and abuse the weaker judgements of Scholars, and to maintaine the Trade and Mystery of Typographers. (46)

Browne synecdochically reduces knowledge to the artifacts that contain it—manuscripts, libraries, lines, leaves, printing presses—and even to the artifacts that might contain it were it destroyed: “the urne and ashes of the *Vatican*.” Even his wish to “reduce” knowledge “as it lay at first” gestures to the contemporary Lucretian discourse of atomism and first principles: he imagines eliminating unnecessary variety and finding the atoms of earthly knowledge, the most “solid” of authors. Jonathan Goldberg writes that Lucretius “posit[s] an identity at the material level between things and words.”

In Browne’s account, likewise, the synthesis of knowledge becomes a physical process imitative of our own relationship to the external world: “we carry with us the wonders we seeke without us: There is all *Africa*, and all her prodigies within us; we are that bold and adventurous piece of nature, which he that studies wisely, learnes in a *compendium*, what others labour at in a divided piece and endlesse volume” (26).

Digby, however, sees Browne as a producer of the very knowledge he scorns, a recorder of details “the knowledge whereof cannot much conduce to any mans betterment” (53). Accordingly, he reserves his most mordant criticism for Browne’s “narration of personalall things, and privat thoughts of his owne” (53), particularly in this passage of *Religio Medici*:

If their [sic] be any truth in Astrology, I may outlive a Jubile, as yet I have not seene one revolution of *Saturne*, nor have my pulse beate thirty yeares, and excepting one, have seene the ashes, and left under ground, all the Kings of *Europe*, have beene contemporary

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to three Emperours, foure Grand Signiours: and as many Popes; me thinkes I have out-lived my selfe, and begin to be weary of the sunne, I have shaken hands with delight in warm bloud and Canicular dayes, I perceive I doe participate the vices of age, the world to me is but a dreame, or mock-show, and we all therein but Pantalones or Antickes to my severer contemplation. (78-79)

The problem for Digby is not the mere presence of Browne’s autobiographical musings, but his impertinent superimposition of them over public persons and events: “As when he speaketh of . . . what Popes, Emperours, Kings, Grand-Seigniors, he hath been contemporary unto, and the like: would it not be thought that hee hath a speciall good opinion of himselfe, (and indeed hee hath reason) when he maketh such great Princes the Land-markes in the Chronology of himselfe?” (53-54). Instead of accepting the priority of popes and emperors, Browne reduces them to a mere backdrop for his own unremarkable story. Instead of modestly inserting himself into the larger sweep of history, Browne defies linear time, vaulting into old age at not quite thirty. Digby’s courtly parenthesis, “and indeed he hath reason,” patronizes Browne while emphasizing his faux pas: Browne may indeed have reason to hold “a speciall good opinion of himself,” but not to graft that opinion onto a larger, more significant narrative. “Surely if hee were to write by retaile the particulars of his owne Story and life,” Digby continues, “it would bee a notable Romanze; since he telleth us in one totall summe, it is a continued miracle of thirty yeares. Though he creepeth gently upon us at the first, yet he groweth a Gyant, an Atllas (to use his owne expression) at the last” (54). The facts of Browne’s biography simply do not merit admission to the historical record.

Significantly, Digby refers to Browne’s account of himself as a “Chronology,” not a history. In early modern terms, a history constructs a narrative with an eye to providing examples for the present; a chronology collates names, events, and other details with limited narrative sophistication. “While history dealt in stories,” write Daniel Rosenberg and Anthony Grafton,
“chronology dealt in facts.” Though related to the earlier genre of chronicle or annal history, the chronology was more or less endemic to the seventeenth century: the first English book to call itself a “chronology” was Edward Lively’s *A true chronologie of the times of the Persian monarchie* (1597). Chronologers differed in aim, scope, and style, but they all provided what Rosenberg and Grafton term “cartographies of time,” whether through words, images, or both. Some chronologies were stand-alone volumes or diagrams that mapped immense spans of time, aiming to calculate the length of biblical empires or the precise age of the world. Others were appendices to histories: Philemon Holland’s 1600 translation of Livy’s history of Rome supplements Livy’s narrative with a new “chronologie to the whole historie.” In a note to the reader, Holland opines that “in the calculation & date of times, which they call Chronologie (a singular light to give direction in a storie) [Livy] is somewhat defective and unlike himselfe, so as he cannot be praised without exception” (1264). Holland takes it upon himself to supply this “singular light,” compiling a “Chronologie to Titus Livius” that includes a detailed discussion of the “diversitie in the account and computation” (1265) of the age of Rome; accounts of “the first soveraigne magistrates of the citie of Rome” (1269), beginning with Romulus and the first consuls; and a list of the years covered in Livy’s history, with the critical events of each year. Given that most English chronologies dealt in centuries or millennia, a “chronology” of thirty years was a ludicrous impossibility.

Digby’s epithet also refers to the materiality of Browne’s writing, for chronology contained visual—and occasionally tactile—qualities that history lacked. While most chronologies existed in two dimensions on the page, Rosenberg and Grafton identify another

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236 Edward Lively, *A true chronologie of the times of the Persian monarchie, and after to the destruction of Ierusalem by the Romanes Wherein by the way briefly is handled the day of Christ his birth* (London: Felix Kingston, 1597).
kind of chronology: the *Wunderkammer* or “wonder cabinet” prized by seventeenth-century literati and natural historians. Carefully curated rooms of “thunder stones and crab shells, alligators and starfish, as well as beautiful works of craft, statues, and automata”\(^\text{238}\) established an imaginative link between time and materiality. Indeed, some scholars argued that artifacts, not facts, constituted the true building blocks of chronology. The Jesuit astronomer and antiquarian Francesco Bianchini advocated the sacrifice of scientific precision for “aesthetic and informational qualities,” believing that relics would produce a more nuanced version of human history: “For a century and more, the Kunst-und Wunderkammer had offered a visual history of culture. Now, Bianchini turned chronology itself into a virtual Kunst-und Wunderkammer.”\(^\text{239}\) In his fondness for lists of “Minerals, Plants, Animals, Elements” (89), for jumbling the physical and the metaphysical, Browne creates wonder cabinets of language. This habit strikes Digby as a failure of taxonomy, a refusal to respect the natural and ethical order of things.

Digby’s investment in correcting Browne’s uses of history may have been more personal than he let on. Digby’s own biography certainly constituted a more conventional subject for “*Romanze*” than the musings of a Norwich physician. The eldest son of a prominent Catholic family, Digby had his first encounter with history at the age of three, when his father, Sir Everard Digby, was executed for his role in the Gunpowder Plot. In the mid-1620s, Digby converted to Anglicanism and determined to advance his court reputation through piracy. His raids on French ships in the Levant impressed the newly acceded Charles I, and upon his return to England in 1629 Digby became a popular courtier and a patron of Ben Jonson. After his beloved wife Venetia’s sudden death in 1633, Digby returned to his old faith. Between 1635 and 1642, he shuttled between England and France, first by choice, then by necessity. Along with other

\(^{238}\) Rosenberg and Grafton, *Cartographies of Time*, 76.
Catholics, he was expelled from the English court in 1641. He returned to Paris, but killed a French baron in a duel in 1642, the year of *Religio Medici*’s unauthorized publication. Pardoned by Louis XIII on the condition that he leave France, Digby fled to England, where he was arrested three months after the outbreak of civil war and imprisoned in a converted episcopal palace. Though Digby scoffed at Browne’s “narration of personall things,” he had already composed *Loose Fantasies*, an autobiographical romance modeled on Helioudorus’ *Æthiopica*, with himself as the gentleman-adventurer “Theagenes” and Venetia as “Stelliana.”

It is not that genre, then, to which Digby objects; it is Browne’s obscurity and his apparent celebration of that obscurity. Unlike Browne, his near-exact contemporary, Digby had not been afforded the privilege of living outside history.

In *Religio Medici* Browne claims, at least theoretically, another privilege: that of renouncing the pursuit of knowledge:

> There is yet another conceit that hath made me shut my booke, which telleth me it is a vanity to waste our dayes in the blind pursuit of knowledge, it is but attending a little longer, and we shall enjoy that by instinct & infusion which we endeavour all here by labour and inquisition: it is better to sit downe in a modest ignorance, and rest contented with the naturall blessing of our owne reasons, then buy the uncertaine knowledge of this life, with sweat and vexation . . . (139)

This argument resembles Hobbes’s distinction in *The Elements of Law*, completed two years earlier between the *mathematici* who work “evidently from humble principles” and the *dogmatici* who “take up maxims from their education, and from the authority of men, or of custom[.]”

For Browne as well as Hobbes, true knowledge of the world stems from the “naturall blessing”

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of right reason innate in every individual. Like other writers of the new time, Browne takes an anti-heroic view of the acquisition of knowledge: it is less a quest or conquest than a “modest” or “humble” acceptance of the evidence of our fallible senses. Digby, however, objects to Browne’s “giving over the search for knowledge, and resigning himselfe up to ignorance” (101), and cites “two important Reasons” for learning: “the one, for the great advantage wee have by learning in this life; the other, for the huge contentment that the acquisition of it here (which implyeth a strong affection to it) will be unto us in the next life” (103). In other words, earthly knowledge has metaphysical qualities capable of accompanying the soul to heaven. Yet Digby’s defense of learning was as peculiar at the time as Browne’s attack on it. In the margin of a 1644 edition of Observations that I examined at the Folger Shakespeare Library, a seventeenth-century reader responds with evident bafflement to Digby’s argument: “ffor Learning. an unusuall Reason.”

Digby’s “unusuall reason” may have proceeded from his unusual situation. A Catholic royalist in 1643 had limited opportunity to use his knowledge in the sublunary world, except in print. In the first sentence of Observations, Digby thanks the Earl of Dorset for “taking so farre into your care the expending of my time during the tediousnesse of my restraint,” thus framing his entire critique of Religio Medici as primarily a way of passing the time. Even the title page of Observations marks it as the product of a particular moment in time: “Occasionally Written by Sir Kenelme Digby, Knight.” Removed at least momentarily from the flow of history, Digby has the leisure to reflect instead of acting. He characterizes learning as something to be done in a period of waiting (“attending but a little longer”), specifically of waiting for death. But in 1643,

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242 Kenelm Digby, Observations upon Religio Medici. Occasionally written by Sir Kenelme Digby, Knight. The second edition corrected and amended (London: printed by F[rancis], L[each], for Lawrence Chapman and Daniel Frere, 1644). Folger call number 140-443q. The anonymous reader made several marginal notes throughout the book, but most of his notes are matter-of-fact descriptions of the subject at hand: e.g. “of the Soul,” “of the Resurrection,” “How souls enter that other state wherein consists their joy or sorrow.” Only his response to Digby’s discussion of learning conveys a critical (if not entirely negative) impulse.
Digby was waiting not only for a release from life, but also for a release within life: the end of his imprisonment. Thus he objects to Browne’s refusal to make his learning readily usable in any other kind of learning. Browne’s particular brand of solipsism produces an inward-facing body of knowledge; his reflections on himself “cannot conduce to any man’s betterment,” even though such betterment seems to be “the chief end of his writing this discourse” (53). Instead, it is a waste of time that churlishly makes readers waste their own time.

Of course, *Religio Medici* had produced another learned work, namely *Observations on Religio Medici*. But Digby was not of the school that believed commentaries should dwarf the texts they analyzed. At the outset of his critique, he expresses frustration with the demands that Browne makes of any commentator wishing to engage with *Religio Medici* on its own terms:

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To make good his assertions here, were very unreasonable, since that to do it exactly (and without exactness, it were no demonstration) requireth a total Survey of the whole science of Bodies, and of all the operations that we are conversant with, of a rational creature; which I having done, with all the succinctness I have been able to explicate so knotty a Subject with, hath taken me up in the first draught neere two hundred sheets of paper. (11)
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Digby the duelist wants an even field and a choice of weapons; Browne the physician insists on keeping his implements out of others’ hands. By sabotaging the reader’s attempts to engage with the questions that *Religio Medici* broaches, Browne closes off his book to dialectic. If we accept Browne’s assertion that he wrote *Religio Medici* as a meditative exercise not intended for publication, Digby’s response seems somewhat unfair. But it also points to an important expectation that seventeenth-century readers brought to their books: the expectation of a civil (if metaphorical) conversation with the author. This is not exactly the “goal-orientated” reading practice described by Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, but it resembles that process.243 Digby

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243 Jardine and Grafton, “‘Studied for Action’: How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy,” 30.
presumes that knowledge production is justified if it leads to the reader’s ineffable “betterment” or stimulates a discourse between the reader and the absent author.

Perhaps to his surprise, Digby’s critique generated a real exchange between himself and Browne, as well as a biting comment from Johnson a century later: “The reciprocal civility of authors is one of the most risible scenes in the farce of life.” In a letter to Digby dated March 3, 1642 (i.e. 1643) and reprinted in the 1645 edition of Religio Medici, Browne protests that the “curious piece” that reached Digby’s hands was in fact a forgery:

[T]he same piece contrived in my private study, and as an exercise unto my self, rather then exercitation for any other, having past from my hand under a broken and imperfect Copy, by frequent transcription it still run forward in corruption, and after the addition of some things, omission of others, and transposition of many, without my assent or privacy, the liberty of these times committed it unto the Press, from whence it issued so disguised, the Author without distinction could not acknowledge it. (A3v)

As if to prove his own collegiality, Browne obligingly takes up the antiquarian metaphor that Digby initiated, referring to his own writing as a “piece” and the pirated edition as “broken and imperfect.” In this conceit, the original text of Religio Medici becomes an ancient manuscript transcribed clumsily but passed off as the genuine article. Nor, Browne continues, was the book meant to spark conversation: it was “pen'd many yeares past, and (what cannot escape your apprehension) with no intention for the Press, or the least desire to oblige the Faith of any man to its assertions.” Browne ends by asking Digby to “honour me in the vouchsafe of your refute” (A4r).

Digby’s response, dated March 20, is almost certainly disingenuous:

[S]uch reflections as I made upon your learn’d and ingenious discourse . . . were Notes hastily set down, as I suddenly ran over your excellent piece, which is of so weighty

245 Thomas Browne, A true and full copy of that which was most imperfectly and surreptitiously printed before under the name of Religio medici (London: printed for Andrew Crooke, 1645).
246 For early modern manuscript forgeries, see Anthony Grafton, Forgers and Critics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 26-32.
subject and so strongly penned, as requireth much time, and sharp attention but to comprehend it; whereas what I writ was the employment but of one sitting; and there was not twenty four houres between my receiving my Lord of Dorsets letter that occasioned what I said, and the finishing my answer to him[.]

This contradicts Digby’s remark in Observations that the first draft forced him to use nearly two hundred sheets of paper (unless, of course, he was capable of writing two hundred pages in a day). Addressing the public, Digby is keen to prove that he has expended a great deal of time and paper; addressing Browne, Digby asserts the opposite. These contradictory claims actually share the same premise: that Browne demands too much time from his reader. In the first version, Digby surrenders that time; in the second version, he refuses to do so. Apologizing for one’s hasty writing (raptim) was a common literary trope in the seventeenth century, as was claiming that a piece of writing was composed in one’s idle moments: Digby assures Browne that the Earl of Dorset, in sending him Religio Medici, “assigned it me as an exercitation to oppose in it for entertainment, such passages as I might judge capable thereof.” But Digby alters these tropes slightly, claiming that Religio Medici’s style is too ornate for its content. Browne’s form and matter disagree: he is serious and long-winded about subjects that deserve little attention from either himself or his reader.

In his letter to Digby, Browne gestures to the fact that, in Reid Barbour’s words, his “attempt to regain control over his work was already a game of catch-up that he would quickly lose; he was already becoming his readers, who would remake him into a wide range of starkly contrasting images.” 247 Multiple authorized editions of Religio Medici appeared in 1643, each containing a different assortment of paratextual material: “Browne’s own preface to the reader; a warning from one A. B. to those who have encountered Digby’s Observations on the Religio

Medici; a list of errata; and an exchange of letters between Browne and Digby.”  

Despite Browne’s original intentions, “Religio Medici would be published again and again, at a frequency slightly greater than once every five years, for the next 360.” Nor did Browne’s struggle to govern his own public image end with his first work. Ironically, given his commitment to dispelling his contemporaries’ “errors of reason,” Browne seems more than other seventeenth-century writers to have attracted the efforts of forgers. 

Fifteen years after the authorized printing of Religio Medici, the first edition of Hydriotaphia and The Garden of Cyrus bore a note “from the stationer to the reader” identifying yet another spurious work:

I cannot omit to advertise, that a Book was published not long since, Entituled, Natures Cabinet Unlockt, bearing the Name of this Authour: If any man have been benefited thereby this Author is not so ambitious as to challenge the honour thereof, as having had a hand in this Work. To distinguish of true and spurious Peeces was the Originall Criticisme, and some were so handsomely counterfeited, that the Entitled Authours needed not to disclaime them. But since it is so, that either he must write himself, or Others will write for him, I know no better Prevention than to act his own Part with lesse intermission of his Pen. (103-104)

The stationer (i.e. bookseller), Henry Brome, follows both Digby and Browne himself in treating Browne’s written works as “Peeces” capable of counterfeiting (and, given the subject matter of the book, he playfully makes the metaphor even more explicit). In the fifth chapter of Hydriotaphia, Browne argues that “restlesse inquietude for the diuturnity of our memories unto present considerations, seems a vanity almost out of date, and superanuated peecie of folly” (73). 

By 1658, he had learned a perhaps more sobering lesson: that even in our own lifetimes, we cannot achieve complete control over the “pieces” that come to represent us in the wider world. No matter the integrity of our self-knowledge, it crumbles in our hands when we attempt to transmit it to others. To rephrase Brome’s unsettling maxim: even if the author writes himself,

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248 Ibid.
250 Thomas Browne, Pseudodoxia epidemica, or, Enquiries into very many received tenents and commonly presumed truths (London: printed for Thomas Harper by Edward Dod, 1646), 8.
others will still write for him. Browne’s consciousness of this fact, however, did not stop him from continuing to respond to Digby’s accusations. I read *Hydriotaphia* as at least partly a reaction to *Observations*, a defiant reiteration of the habits of thought and style that Digby had criticized. Once again, Browne privileges sensory experience over historical verity, records material details that other scholars would let fall, and reasons upward from silkworms—or, in this case, from ashes.

3. Three Hundred Golden Bees

   In *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646), published almost exactly midway between *Religio Medici* and *Hydriotaphia*, Browne opens with a meditation on the decay of knowledge:

   Would Truth dispense, we could be content, with Plato, that knowledge were but Remembrance; that Intellectuall acquisition were but Reminiscentiall evocation, and new impressions but the colourishing of old stamps which stood pale in the soul before. For, what is worse knowledge is made by oblivion; and to purchase a clear and warrantable body of Truth, we must forget and part with much wee know. . . . And this wee shall more readily performe, if we timely survey our knowledge; impartially singling out those encroachments, which junior compliance and popular credulity hath admitted. (A3r-v)

Browne’s epigrammatic reflection that “knowledge is made by oblivion” evokes Hobbes’s argument in *Leviathan* that “Imagination and Memory” are “nothing but decaying sense” (2:26).

In both cases, decay brings intellectual opportunity; the old figure of *tempus edax rerum* becomes a friend, destroying false knowledge to make room for truth. Indeed, Browne suggests that his readers help the devourer along by “timely” identifying and purging their own errors, many of which arise from an overvaluation of ancient authors: “[T]he mortallest enemy unto knowledge, and that which hath done the greatest execution upon truth, hath beene a peremptory adhesion unto Authority, and more especially the establishing of our beliefe upon the dictates of Antiquities” (20). A “timely” approach to error, then, is an anti-historical one: in their reverence for antiquity, Browne’s contemporaries “impose a thraldome on their times, which the ingenuity
of no age should endure” (20). A “timely” approach is also an unromantic one. Browne pokes fun at readers who accept “the mendacity of Greece” (22) in such matters as metamorphosis: “That Niobe weeping over her children was turned into a stone, was nothing else but that during her life, she erected over their sepultures, a marble tombe of her owne” (23). To act “timely” is not only to act in time (within time, just in time) but also to act like time in its capacity for dispassionate destruction.

In Hydriotaphia, Browne again takes up the banner of time against history. “The treasures of time lie high, in Urnes, Coynes, and Monuments, scarce below the roots of some vegetables,” he writes in the first chapter. “Time hath endlesse rarities, and shows of all varieties; which reveals old things in heaven, makes new discoveries in earth, and even earth it self a discovery” (2). Humanity, significantly, plays no part in this process. (Burke notes that “many of the ‘fragments’ which the antiquaries tried to fit together originally came to light by accident, often in the course of digging the foundations of buildings.”) Throughout Hydriotaphia, Browne suggests that the modern world is powerless against the onslaught of the past. In the prefatory epistle to Thomas le Gros, himself “no slender master of antiquities,” Browne even goes out of his way to downplay his agency in the composition of his own book:

We were hinted by the occasion, not catched the opportunity to write of old things, or intrude upon the Antiquary. We are coldly drawn unto discourses of antiquities, who have scarce time before us to contemplate new things, or make out learned Novelties. But seeing they arose as they lay, almost in silence among us, at least in short account suddenly passed over; we were very unwilling they should die again, and be buried twice among us. (A3r)

The passive voice and self-distancing first-person plural pronoun of the first phrase (“We were hinted by the occasion”) suggest an indifference in the choice of subject. Instead of “catch[ing]” the opportunity or “intrud[ing]” upon the antiquary—two active, almost violent, verbs—Browne

251 Burke, “Images as Evidence in Seventeenth-Century Europe,” 275.
is “hinted by the occasion.” This phrase stresses the role of accident in the antiquarian project. The debris of history reveals itself at random, and though these particular urns cannot compete with the “imperial faces” that le Gros has encountered in his own research, they are all Browne has at hand. The passive voice continues into the next sentence: now Browne is “drawn,” swept along on the current of occasion, though against his will. Browne’s idea of “occasion” diverges from the usual one. In the seventeenth century, occasion was something to be, in Browne’s phrase, “caught” before it fled; it did not go out of its way to hint, like a Caroline courtier, that a certain author might be interested in writing a certain book. In Browne’s account of the genesis of *Hydriotaphia*, by contrast, the author is passive and the past active. This neat reversal transforms the author’s task from research and creation to courteous response.

Throughout the preface, Browne uses the language of courtesy, even of professionalism, to dispel the grand mystery of the past. Despite the “darker and more skeptical tone” of the later Browne, Claire Preston sees *Hydriotaphia* as an example of the early modern “civil exchange of learning which was itself both an emblematic and a practical foray against the forces of dispersion which investigation attempted to repair.” Though not himself an antiquarian, Browne “speaks in *Urne-Buriall* as one antiquary to another,” especially in the dedication to le Gros. For Preston, Browne’s civility in *Hydriotaphia* is the civility of a scholar toward his contemporaries and intellectual equals. But Browne actually displays two kinds of politeness in *Hydriotaphia*: the first, as Preston notes, toward fellow scholars; the second toward the anonymous occupants of the urns. Whereas the first kind of civility works to strengthen Browne’s social ties with other intellectuals, the second kind undermines the exceptionality that

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those intellectuals would attribute to the ancients. By treating the dead as he would the living, Browne denies them any sort of exalted status. “We present not these as any strange sight,” he tells le Gros, reflecting that “we were very unwilling they should die again, and be buried twice among us.” Now that they have been excavated, the dead are in some sense alive; and being alive, they are entitled to the same courtesy Browne bestows on other living people, but no more than that. Browne’s chief defense of Hydriotaphia is, essentially, that it would have been rude not to write it.

As Digby points out in Observations, many of the living people with whom Browne interacted regularly were his patients. He describes the antiquarian project as an extension of his own profession: “Beside, to preserve the living, and to make the dead to live, to keep men out of their Urnes, and discourse of humane fragments in them, is not impertinent to our profession; whose study is life and death, who daily behold examples of mortality, and of all men least need artificial memento’s, or coffins by our bed side, to minde us of our graves.” This remark may be a snide reference to John Donne, who in later life made a well-known habit of sleeping in his own coffin; but it also represents an explicit refusal to discuss antiquity in any terms but those of mere life and death. Later in Hydriotaphia Browne speculates that, because they received a proper burial, the inhabitants of the Norfolk urns were “no Reliques or Traitors to their Countrey, Self-killers, or Sacrilegious Malefactors; Persons in old apprehension unworthy of the earth” (60). Why go to the trouble of assuring his readers that the subjects of his discourse were not criminals or suicides? What Browne values about the urns, it seems, are the “humane fragments in them,” not the historical or cultural truths they might convey. But these fragments “have no joyful voices; silently expressing old mortality, the ruines of forgotten times, and can only speak with life, how long in this corruptible frame, some parts may be uncorrupted; yet able to out-last
bones long unborn, and noblest pyle among us.” If these people were law-abiding during their lives, in death they commit the same offense against the present and future that Digby attributes to Browne in *Observations*. The bones of the ancients outstay their welcome on the historical stage; like the thirty-year-old Browne, they impudently outlast popes, emperors, kings, and “Grand-Seigniors.”

Browne’s ambivalent civility is nowhere more apparent than in the preface, where he argues that the modern English owe the ancient Roman colonists a debt of honor: “remembring the early civility they brought upon these Countreys, and forgetting long passed mischiefs; We mercifully preserve their bones, and pisse not upon their ashes.” Later in *Hydriotaphia*, Browne reflects that the ancient custom of the “*Archimime, or Jester* attending the funerall train, and imitating the speech, gestures, and manners of the deceased, was too light for such solemnities” (59-60); but the jocoserious tone of his preface throws that argument into doubt and casts an air of irony over the entire text. It is not surprising that a prefatory epistle to a close friend should be more lighthearted than a dedication to a noble patron; but Browne’s particular brand of lightheartedness seems intended to emphasize that *Hydriotaphia* represents no solemn scholarly endeavor. Camden and Verstegan do not entertain the possibility of urinating on the remains of the ancients. Browne also puns on the very fact of death, observing that “when even Crows were funereally burnt, *Poppaea* the wife of *Nero* found a particular grave enterment. Now as all customes were founded upon some bottome of Reason, so there wanted not grounds for this” (5). His use of “grave,” “bottom,” and “grounds” is surely not accidental. Browne may censure the ancients for deriving “too light thoughts from Objects of mortality, while some drew provocatives of mirth from Anatomies, and Juglers shewed tricks with Skeletons” (39), but he is not above indulging in his own “provocatives of mirth.” Throughout *Hydriotaphia*, humor works
as a prophylactic to antiquarian pomposity: it keeps Browne (who would surely have forgiven this pun) grounded.

Especially in his descriptions of the urns, Browne’s style mimics the materiality he discusses. The urns enclosed charred human bones and remnants of an ancient culture; an urn inspected by Browne himself contained “peeces of small boxes, or combs handsomely wrought, handles of small brasse instruments, brazen nippers and in one some kinde of Opale” (14). Browne conjectures that “these were the Vrnes . . . either of Romanes themselves, or Brittains Romanised, which observed the Romane customes” (15). However, he leaves room for doubt: due to the absence of imperial coins at the burial site, it is difficult to tell “the time of these Urnes deposited, or precise Antiquity of these Reliques” (20). After nine pages of anthropological speculation, Browne lists the artifacts a second time, in more detail but identical order: “substances resembling Combes, Plates like Boxes, fastened with Iron pins, and handsomely overwrought like the necks or Bridges of Musickal Instruments, long brasse plates overwrought like the handles of neat implements, brazen nippers to pull away hair, and in one a kinde of Opale yet maintaining a blewish colour” (23). But though the individual details are more precise (the opal is “blewish”; the function of the brass tweezers is “to pull away hair”), the overall effect of the passage is somehow more vague. The fragments of boxes are no longer separate from the handles of musical instruments; instead, Browne gives us a baffling pair of similes: “Plates like Boxes, fastened with Iron pins, and handsomely overwrought like the necks or Bridges of Musickal Instruments.” The word “like” functions strangely here. Despite the increased ornateness of Browne’s description, it is no longer possible to picture exactly what he is describing. How can a plate be like a box, but also like the neck or bridge of a lute? The reader comes away from this second inventory with a confused sense of grandeur.
The next paragraph offers another fantasia of vagueness:

Now that they accustomed to burn or bury with them, things wherein they excelled, delighted, or which were dear unto them, either as farewells unto all pleasure, or vain apprehension that they might use them in the other world, is testified by all Antiquity. Observable from the Gemme or Berill Ring upon the finger of Cynthia, the Mistresse of Propertius, when after her Funerall Pyre her Ghost appeared unto him. And notably illustrated from the Contents of that Romane Urne preserved by Cardinall Farnese, wherein besides great number of Gemmes with heads of Gods and Goddesses, were found an Ape of Agath, a Grashopper, an Elephant of Ambre, a Crystall Ball, three glasses, two Spoons, and six Nuts of Crystall. And beyond the content of Urnes, in the Monument of Childrick the first, and fourth King from Pharamond, casually discovered three years past at Tournay, restoring unto the world much gold richly adorning his Sword, two hundred Rubies, many hundred Imperial Coyns, three hundred golden Bees, the bones and horseshoe of his horse enterred with him, according to the barbarous magnificence of those dayes in their sepulchral Obsequies. (23)

This pronoun “they” does not follow from a clear antecedent: the sentence immediately preceding the paragraph begins with a passive verb (“In most were found substances resembling Combes”) and ends with “a kinde of Opale yet maintaining a blewish colour.” Who, then, are “they”? The obvious answer would be “the ancients” or “the Romans,” but the pronoun resists obvious answers. Instead, it serves the dubious anthropological purpose of linking the anonymous urn-burial culture with historical Rome, literary Rome, and pre-Christian France. “They” are, tautologically, “the kind of ancient people who buried treasure.” Browne provides what seems like an explanation of this practice—they buried “things wherein they excelled, delighted, or were dear unto them”—but this framing device obfuscates even as it illuminates. The frame disappears as we look closer. We never discover why the beryl ring was dear to Cynthia, or why the amber elephant and golden bees symbolized either pleasure or a farewell to it. Spoons and glasses might prove convenient for hungry souls, but what use is the grasshopper? Browne heaps up treasures—hundreds of rubies and ancient coins; a semiprecious bestiary of apes, elephants, horses, and bees—but offers little analysis or speculation. The inventory creates
an overwhelming impression of luxury and foreignness: a distancing effect rather than an illuminating one.

The final flourish of the third sentence, “according to the barbarous magnificence of those dayes in their sepulchral Obsequies,” seems designed to close the frame, to provide a second explanation and a sense of completeness. Instead, it constitutes yet another example of false analysis. Rather than elucidating the purpose of the jewels, it redoubles their dazzling effect. The fairy-tale phrase “those dayes”—two syllables evoking innumerable years—rests between a pair of Latinate gems: “barbarous magnificence” and “sepulchral Obsequies.” The inventory of treasures is pure ekphrasis, but this string of phrases is pure mimesis: a mimesis of Browne’s own ekphrasis, not of anything in the world. Browne’s language becomes a jewel in itself, an artifact to be admired but not analyzed. The more rarities and epithets he piles up, the more unintelligible the ancients’ intentions seem. In *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, Browne had declared his commitment to comprehensibility in scholarship: “Our first intentions considering the common interest of Truth, resolved to propose it unto the Latine republike and equall judges of Europe; but owing in the first place this service unto our Country, and therein especially unto its ingenuous Gentry, we have declared our selfe in a language best conceived” (A4v). In order to correct the intellectual errors of the English nation, *Pseudodoxia* needed to reach the widest readership possible. The language of *Hydriotaphia* operates on the same principle but at cross purposes: not to attract readers to the subject of the discourse but to alienate them from it.

When Browne does portray a direct communion between past and present, it is not intellectual or emotional but gustatory. It is also only semi-serious. In the third chapter, Browne reports that some excavators (though presumably not the ones in Norfolk) have found “sepulchrall Vessels containing liquors, which time hath incrassated into gellies. . . . And some
yet retaining a vinosity and spirit in them, which if any hath tasted they have farre exceeded the Palats of Antiquity. Liquors not to be computed by years of annuall Magistrates, but by great conjunctions and the fatall periods of Kingdomes” (33). In *Religio Medici*, Browne reduces monarchs to walk-on actors in his personal history play. In *Hydriotaphia*, he goes even further, flattening cosmic phenomena and historical eras into a backdrop for a wine tasting. In *Pseudodoxia*, he enumerates several ways in which the moderns have surpassed the ancients: for instance, some “denied the Antipodes, and some unto the penalty of contrary affirmations; but the experience of our enlarged navigations, can now assert them beyond all dubitation” (24). This argument finds an irreverent echo in *Hydriotaphia*: not only have we overtaken our forefathers in natural history and navigation, but we have also “farre exceeded the Palats of Antiquity” by drinking wine older than any liquor they could have obtained.

For that matter, Browne suggests, the ancients have no wish to be discovered, let alone revered. “We conceive not their Urnes to have descended naked as they appear, or to have entred their graves without the old habit of flowers,” he writes in the third chapter. “The Urne of *Philopœmen* was so laden with flowers and ribbons, that it afforded no sight of it self” (36). The “their” in the first sentence refers to the Walsingham urns, which Browne believed, incorrectly, to be Roman, but he shifts abruptly from Romanized Britain to Greece, deriving his explanatory anecdote from Plutarch’s life of the Greek general Philopoemen (253 BCE-183 BCE). According to Plutarch, Philopoemen’s followers “collected his ashes in an urn, and set out for home, not in loose or promiscuous order, but with a blending of triumphal procession and funeral rites. For their heads were wreathed with garlands while their eyes were full of tears . . . The urn itself, almost hidden from sight by a multitude of fillets and wreaths, was borne by

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254 Graham Parry notes that the engraving on the title page of *Hydriotaphia* “shows that Browne’s urns were Saxon, though there was no way in 1658 that Browne could have known that.” See Parry, “Thomas Browne and the Uses of Antiquity,” in Barbour and Preston, eds., *Thomas Browne: The World Proposed*, 73.
Polybius, the son of the Achaean general, and about him were the chief men of the Achaeans.”

In his sentence-long adaptation of this episode, Browne eliminates Plutarch’s account of the religious rites surrounding the burial. The mourners disappear with their garlands and their sorrow, leaving only the urn and its trappings. The oddly reflexive phrase “it afforded no sight of it self” suggests that the urn itself once had a will or desire, and that its desire (to be invisible, to be smothered under flowers and ribbons) is directly opposed to the moderns’ plan for it (to signify, to have a voice). Browne even exaggerates the invisibility of the urn: it is no longer “almost hidden” but completely disguised. To what end, Browne asks, do we seek knowledge of a past so determined to elude our grasp? What is it that we expect ancient objects to say or do for us, and is it possible for them to communicate anything beyond the time that has passed since their creation?

It is appropriate, then, that Browne should bring up the cento genre in his preface: “A compleat piece of vertue must be made up from the Centos of all ages, as all the beauties of Greece could make but one handsome Venus” (A3r-v). George Hugo Tucker observes that it was something of an early modern cliché to invoke the cento in reference to “Rome’s continued self-fashioning, both physical and textual, out of the artefacts and debris of a plundered world, with Rome still involved also in an active process of ruine.” The rearrangement of phrases or passages from one or more texts, traditionally the works of Vergil, resembled the reconstruction of the past from fragments and ashes. Detached from their original contexts, the excerpts come together to form a new meaning that can be serious or comical, religious or erotic: “Sixteen centos survive from antiquity: four possess Christian subject matter, two are wedding songs

containing obscene accounts of the deflowering of the bride, two are on homely topics, and eight relate mythological narratives.”

Perhaps the best-known ancient cento in early modern Europe was the Cento nuptialis of the fourth-century poet Ausonius, who reordered lines from the Aeneid to create a bawdy wedding poem. For Ausonius, the cento was “de seriis ludicrum,” a ridiculous poem compiled from serious matters. Some early modern authors complicated Ausonius’ vision of the genre as inherently jocoserious: Alexander Ross’s popular Christiad (1634) made Christ an epic hero by cobbling together “half-lines, lines, and brief passages from Vergil’s Eclogues, Georgics, and Aeneid, arranged, grammatically adjusted, and with necessary substitutions of the names of people and places[.]”

But whether the end product was devotional or debauched, the cento was perhaps more significant as a practice. It revealed the reader’s power over a text: the power to reshape the original form, and by extension the original meaning. Though a finished cento could be likened to an antiquarian reconstruction, it was not an exact likeness, for its composition often required a deliberate act of destruction. The Aeneid began as a self-sufficient whole, not a collection of fragments; the same hand that created the cento had first to degrade the primary text.

As a result of its dual nature, the cento represented different possibilities to different writers. For Ross, Vergil’s works are already incomplete: despite their “chaste” diction and content, they lack the finishing touch of revelation. Creating a Christian cento from an otherwise impeccable pagan source is therefore purely constructive. In Hydriotaphia, Browne takes a more nuanced view. In the preface, as we have seen, he expresses ambivalence toward the project of “erect[ing] a new Britannia” from the debris of her past. The political cento is,

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259 Ibid., 137.
perhaps, doomed to failure. But as literature, the cento repeatedly directs the reader’s attention to its fragmentary nature, its artificiality, its shameless ventriloquizing of long-dead people who would rather not speak to us at all. Like the Walsingham urns, the cento conveys time rather than meaning, “expressing old mortality [and] the ruines of forgotten times.” It also allows Browne to approach the ancient world with irreverence, like the quack doctors who raid tombs for the ingredients for their salves and potions: “The Aegyptian Mummies, which Cambyses or time hath spared, avarice now consumeth. Mummie is become Merchandise, Mizraim cures wounds, and Pharaoh is sold for balsoms” (78-79). Significantly, Browne intends this as a censure not of the spurious doctors but of the vainglorious Egyptians who “contriv[ed] their bodies in sweet consistences, to attend the return of their souls. But all was vanity, feeding the winde, and folly” (78).

As befits the spirit of the cento, I will end my analysis of Hydriotaphia with a reflection on an entirely different text, albeit one that had profound and wide-ranging effects on seventeenth-century English literature.260 Near the end of the second part of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra’s Don Quixote (1615), the knight and his squire attend a party hosted by a gentleman who owns a peculiar artifact: “a Table that seemed to bee of Iasper, borne vp with feete of the same, vpon which there was set a Head, as if it beene of brasse, iust as your Romane Emperors are vsed to be, from the brest vpward” (419).261 Claiming that an enchanter imbued the brass head with “the property and quality to answer to any thing that it is asked” (420), Don Antonio Moreno invites his guests to put it to the test. Unbeknownst to the company, the head and jasper table are hollow, and a tin pipe runs through them to another room. There Don Antonio’s nephew

\footnote{260 For a thorough compendium of those effects, see Dale B. J. Randall and Jackson C. Boswell, Cervantes in Seventeenth-Century England: The Tapestry Turned (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).}

\footnote{261 Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, The second part of the history of the valorous and witty knight-errant, Don Quixote of the Mancha, trans. Thomas Shelton (London: printed for Edward Blount, 1620).}
hides and, listening and speaking through the pipe, gives glibly commonsensical answers to the
questions he hears. After the wellborn guests ask their questions and marvel at the “tenor voyce”
emanating from the head, Don Quixote’s squire Sancho Panza takes his turn:

Sancho was the last Demander, and his question vvas this; Head, shall I haply haue
another Gouernment? shall I be free from this penurous Squires life? shall I see my Wife
and Children againe? To which it vvvas answered him: In thy house shalt thou gouerne;
whither if thou returne, thou shalt see thy Wife and children, and leauing thy seruice, thou
shalt leaue being a Squire. Very good (quoth Sancho) this I could haue told before my
selfe, and my fathers horse could haue said no more. Beast, quoth Don Quixote, what
anwvere wouldst thou haue? Is it not enough, that the answeres this head giues thee, are
correspondent to thy questions? Tis true, said Sancho: but I would haue knowne more.

Don Quixote and Sancho have very different ideas of what it means for an object to “answer to
any thing that it is asked.” Don Quixote is content with the mere fact of a talking Roman bust,
but the illiterate Sancho, unaffected by the eerie spectacle of a classical-looking artifact coming
to life, demands to “[know] more” about his own present. Don Quixote thinks it sufficient that
the head’s answers correspond to the questions asked; Sancho expects the head to deliver real
solutions to his problems. When it comes to artifacts, Browne suggests, we must follow Don
Quixote and seek real solutions elsewhere.

The frontispiece to *Hydriotaphia* features the sole illustration in the book: an engraving
of four urns, along with a motto from Book IV.11 of the Elegies of Propertius (abbreviated here
to “Propert.”): “En sum quod digitis quinque levatur onus,” or “See, I am an amount that can be
gathered in five fingers.” In this elegy, a dead woman named Cornelia addresses her husband
Paullus, lamenting that her entire life has been reduced to a handful of ashes. The choice of
image is odd, as the text never describes the outward appearance of the urns or, for that matter,
refers back to the illustration. It is possible that Browne had little, if any, control over the
illustration; printing houses often commissioned engravings (or, if trying to save money, chose
ready-made engravings) without consulting the author. But it seems fitting that *Hydriotaphia’s*
only illustration should be an arrangement of four urns, their modestly decorated surfaces
revealing nothing of their contents or creators.
Chapter Four: Libertine Time

A dandy has no philosophy other than a transitory one: a life interest: time is the time of his life.

—Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*\(^{262}\)

1. A Singular Talent

Born in 1621, Andrew Marvell was younger than Browne by sixteen years, Hobbes by thirty-three, and Donne by forty-eight.\(^{263}\) While he evokes the other three writers in his interrogations of the value of history, his proposed solutions betray a habit of thought that Donne diagnosed as a modern malady: individualism. “For every man alone thinks that he hath got / To be a phoenix, and that there can be / None of that kind of which he is, than he,” complains the speaker of the *Anniversaries*. Donne’s antidote to individualism is a history of the world’s departed soul: “[s]he that had all Magnetique force alone, / To draw, and fasten sundred parts in one.” For Hobbes, too, any true account of time must be a collective one. The state of war, “where every man is Enemy to every man,” is characterized by “no account of Time,” while the contract between subject and sovereign is a historical fiction maintained by the willing belief of every member of a society. Browne displays wry civility toward the ancients (“We mercifully preserve their bones, and pisse not upon their ashes”) in order to dissipate their aura of exceptionality. By contrast, the temporalities of Marvell’s poetry are not usually shared. The poet of “Tom May’s Death” is a lonely figure who “single fights forsaken virtue’s cause” (66).\(^{264}\) Oliver Cromwell has the power “[t]o ruin the great work of time” in the space of a single year.

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\(^{263}\) I presented portions of this chapter at the second conference of the Oxford-Princeton Andrew Marvell research partnership in Princeton, NJ, in May 2011.


Marvellian time is essentially singular. What, then, does Marvell hope to gain from opposing an individual and largely internal temporality to the pressures of history? If the poet fights for virtue in defiance of the world, for whom does he fight?

The singularity asserted by Marvell’s poetic speakers has much in common with the libertinism excoriated in English literature in the mid-seventeenth century. Today, the word “libertinism” almost always implies sexual freedom; but the early modern definition encompassed many kinds of freedom, particularly a studied detachment from organized religion and social responsibility. In his 1656 dictionary Glossographia, Thomas Blount defines “libertinism” as “nothing else, but a false liberty of belief and manners, which will have no other dependence but on peculiar fancy and passion.” Blount uses “peculiar” to mean “individual,” but the second half of his definition adds some complications: “It is a strange monster, whereof it seems Iob made description under the figure of Behemoth; as much to say, as a creature composed of all sorts of beasts, of which it bears the name.”

The libertine, then, stands apart from society even as he subsumes its most unsavory aspects, becoming what Clement Ellis calls “a well-digested bundle of most Costly vanities . . . a Volume of Methodicall Errataes bound up in a gilt Cover . . . a Curiously wrought Cabinet full of Shels and other Trumpery, which were much better quite Empty, then so emptily full.”

It is no coincidence that Ellis associates the modern gallant with the antiquarian “wonder cabinet”: as I showed in the previous chapter, antiquarianism received its own share of criticism for valuing the material and impermanent

265 Thomas Blount, Glossographia, or, A dictionary, interpreting all such hard words, whether Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, French, Teutonick, Belgick, British or Saxon, as are now used in our refined English tongue (London: printed by Thomas Newcomb, 1656), Z5r-v.
266 Ellis, The gentile sinner, 15-16.
over the abstract and eternal. In a similar vein, Richard Brathwaite attacks the “fleshly Libertine [who] mis-employeth Time”: “his care extends but onely to the day, slaving himselfe to the pleasures of sinne, and preferring the huskes of vanity, before the soule solacing cates of eternity[.]” The senses connect us to the world, but they also isolate us within our own perceptions. The libertine is a monstrous spectacle, lonely in his copiousness and material abundance.

In early modern England, libertinism, like atheism and epicureanism, seems to have had a more coherent identity as a perceived threat to social stability than as a lifestyle or doctrine. However, seventeenth-century France and Italy produced a self-consciously libertine intellectual tradition that has lately been recognized as an influence on Marvell’s poetry. Giulio Pertile argues that “Upon Appleton House” in particular draws on the works of the French poet Théophile de Viau (1590-1626). “French libertinism was philosophical and skeptical in tendency,” Pertile notes. “Unlike the culture of the ‘rake’ in Restoration England, it had a contemplative as well as hedonistic bent,” thus diverging from the carpe diem lyrics of “poets such as Herrick, Lovelace, and Cowley[.]” Though Marvell does not share the ironically named Théophile’s “emphatic contempt for Christian morality,” he evokes continental libertine literature through his evident fascination with subjectivity, materialism, and the power of nature. Pertile identifies a libertine vein in Marvell’s “Fairfax period,” i.e. the years 1650-1652, but focuses on the less explicitly political poems of those years: “Upon Appleton House”

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269 Ibid., 401, 411.
and “On a Drop of Dew.”\textsuperscript{270} I propose that Marvell’s public poems of the 1650s and 1660s betray a similar libertine sensibility, delineating a new mode of existence in an equally new political system, one in which traditional norms and values seem to have lost their force. In other words, Marvell models how to be a libertine political subject, someone conscious of but not defined by political and historical forces, someone who guards his singularity in the face of overwhelming social changes.

The libertine’s relationship with history, according to his early modern detractors, is almost nonexistent. “He takes an especiall care that nothing may ever appeare \textit{old} about him, but the \textit{Old Man of Sin},” writes Ellis, “and him he every day exposes to Publick view in a \textit{severall Dresse}, that (if it be possible) he may perswade the world to believe that all \textit{there is New} too.”\textsuperscript{271} He is a man of the times, a temporizer, in politics as well as in fashion. Blount defines “temporize” as “to observe, agree with, or apply himself to the time; to seek to please the times, to live as the times go; also to linger or protract the time,” and “temporizer” as “[h]e that doth so, a time-server.”\textsuperscript{272} The temporizer, like the libertine or the man of fashion, strives always to inhabit and stretch out what Alexander Nagel calls “now-time.”\textsuperscript{273} As we have seen, Thomas Flatman describes the temporizer in sartorial terms:

\begin{quote}
HE is One, that is always in \textit{fashion}; though Time puts on \textit{New Clothes} every Day. He is divided from none more then himself. He is a \textit{Spawn of Janus}, who prefac’\textit{t} His \textit{Old Visage} with a \textit{New mode}, according to the season of the \textit{Year}; or as some would have it, \textit{shifted} His \textit{Countenance} against \textit{Quarter Day}. . . . Look in his face, and you may see what a \textit{Clock} ’tis though the \textit{Sun} don’t \textit{Shine}: When He holds up His \textit{noddle}, then ’tis towards \textit{Noonday} Glory with him. . . . To name Him \textit{Proteus} is too much to hallow Him:
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[270] \textit{Ibid.}, 396. Marvell stayed at Nun Appleton, one of the homes of Thomas, Lord Fairfax, retired general of the New Model Army, while serving as the tutor to Fairfax’s daughter Maria.
\item[271] Ellis, \textit{The gentile sinner}, 20.
\item[272] Blount, \textit{Glossographia}, Qq5r.
\end{footnotes}
for He *Turn-Coats* Himself, *facing* the *Ancient Matter* with a *New fashion'd shape*, which
flatly fall's out with the former[...]*²⁷⁴*

The word “temporizer” in seventeenth-century literature usually implies a changeable approach
to politics or religion, and Flatman indeed characterizes his temporizer as “*Religions Litter'd*
*Sooterkin* [chimney sweep] kindled by the *Stove* of his own counterfeit *Zeal.* *²⁷⁵* *But in the mid-
seventeenth century, political and religious allegiances were far from inward and invisible: they
encompassed preferences in costume, architecture, language, and art. It is little wonder, then,
*that Flatman’s temporizer has much in common with Ellis’s* “well-digested *bundle* of most
*Costly vanities.*” Both the temporizer and the libertine devote themselves to the changeable
material trappings of the world and neglect its eternal verities. For their critics, a vision of the
world based on the senses is necessarily a limited one, precisely because it is singular. The
temporizer and the libertine are *reductiones ad absurdum* of Baconian empiricism.

Marvell’s own political poetry has long been considered to betray a temporizing or
“loyalist” sensibility.*²⁷⁶* How else to explain Marvell’s composition of “*Tom May’s Death,*” a
satire on the late parliamentarian poet and translator Thomas May, in the same year as “*An
Horatian Ode upon Cromwell’s Return from Ireland,*” a commemoration of Cromwell’s success
in suppressing an Irish royalist insurrection? Neither poem speaks decisively in favor of one side
or the other: “*An Horatian Ode*” reminds the reader of Charles I’s dignity on the scaffold and
commends Cromwell in almost comically lukewarm terms (“*Much to the man is due*”), while
“*Tom May’s Death,*” as I will show, casts as much aspersion on Jonson as on May. But we can

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²⁷⁴ Flatman, *Naps upon Parnassus*, E4v-r.
²⁷⁵ The word “sooterkin” could also indicate a Dutchman or “[a]n imaginary kind of afterbirth formerly attributed to
Dutch women,” and Flatman indeed calls the temporizer “*Religions Amsterdam’d Translator: *"sooterkin, n."* OED
²⁷⁶ See John Wallace, *Destiny His Choice: The Loyalism of Andrew Marvell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 1968). Wallace argues that we should consider Marvell one of “the loyalists—thousands and thousands of
them—who turned their coats with the times and followed with a clear conscience the changes of regime between
1649 and 1688” (4).
gain a deeper appreciation of Marvell’s poetic corpus, particularly his approaches to time and history, if we read him as not a temporizer or loyalist but as a libertine. Though the categories have much in common, the word “libertine” allows us to read his erotic poems, such as “To His Coy Mistress” and “Upon Appleton House,” as part of the same intellectual and aesthetic endeavor as his more explicitly political verse. A temporizer is a kind of libertine, but not the only kind.

For the purposes of this chapter, I define a “libertine” poetic vision as an essentially materialist one, grounded in the assumption that our experience of time originates from what Hobbes calls “decaying sense.” In Marvell’s poetry, a meditation on time or history almost always follows, or exists in tandem with, a meditation on the speaker’s material surroundings. Temporality is thus limited by individual sensory perception. Marvell does not necessarily advocate singularity, but he implies that it is inescapable. Hence his repeated upending of temporal and spatial proportion, especially in nature: his “vegetable love” (CM, 11) and “unfathomable grass” (UAH, 370). Marvell takes for granted that, as Donne laments in the *Anniversaries*, “beauty’s best, proportion, is dead” because, limited by our senses, we have no universal standard for it. But, also like Donne, he wrests a new kind of beauty from disproportion, a beauty that we might term “baroque.”

Christine Buci-Glucksmann argues that the baroque mode in art and literature is characterized by “the internal criticism of all ontological absolutism found in the classical episteme and the rejection of its assumptions,” including “transparency of a complete real . . . The baroque confronts a flawed real that is undermined by ‘nothingness,’ perpetually opaque, and most often labyrinthine[.]”

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277 For a study of the baroqueness of Marvell’s visual effects, see Kathleen Hunt Dolan, “Figures of Disclosure: Pictorial Space in Marvell and Gongora,” *Comparative Literature* 40:3 (Summer 1988), 245-258.

the individual to prioritize his own perceptions, which makes the libertine the ideal navigator of
the baroque landscape. Libertinism, Karel Vanhaesebrouck and Pol Dehert argue, is “an attitude
in which the individual living in the ever-shifting early modern world—a world that one could
describe as fundamentally ‘baroque’—shapes himself . . . and his surrounding world by living
life as an experiment.” 279 Likewise, Marvell’s poetic speakers view time and space as plastic
substances susceptible to the manipulations of the individual will. Blair Worden argues that “the
sense of time which pervades Marvell’s poetry as a force which either masters or is mastered,
brings him close to Machiavelli’s teaching.” 280 Machiavelli, however, believes that “men are
born and live and die in an order which remains ever the same”; Marvell, I will argue, takes a far
more skeptical view of the consistency of human nature, and thus of the educative power of the
past. 281

What is the role of poetry, or of verbal communication in general, in a world in which the
limitations imposed by sensory perception make themselves so continually known? For Hobbes,
as I showed in my second chapter, language is the more effective the closer it stays to its origins
in “decaying sense,” because humans hold most passions and sympathies in common. Language
fails when it escapes its “humble principles” and begins referring to itself instead of to material
reality. But Hobbes acknowledges that it is all too easy to slip into the “abuse of words”: in this
postlapsarian world, language will always undermine our attempts to use it correctly. Marvell
takes Hobbes’s argument further, suggesting that we cannot assume that passions or sensory
perceptions are points of agreement between one individual and another. Instead of establishing
common ground between author and reader, language serves to emphasize the epistemological

279 Karel Vanhaesebrouck and Pol Dehert, “Introduction: Libertine Bodies or the Politics of Baroque Corporeality,”
Early Modern Cultural Studies 12:2 (Spring 2012), 2.
281 Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 98.
gap between them. For Marvell, then, poetry is perhaps the one truthful form of literary expression, the only form that is frank about its own communicative limits.

Ironically, these limits emerge most clearly in a poem that seems on face to argue for the poet’s importance in troubled times. The first poem I will consider in this chapter is “Tom May’s Death” (1650), a Menippean satire on the parliamentarian writer Thomas May. Marvell makes Thomas May meet the ghost of Ben Jonson, who declares that the poet must “single fight[] forsaken virtue’s cause.” But Jonson’s high-minded opinions in “Tom May’s Death” contradict the ones he espoused in life, raising the question of whether anyone but the dead can achieve nonpartisan virtue. I then move to Marvell’s trio of poems in honor of Oliver Cromwell, written between 1650 and 1658: “An Horatian Ode,” “The First Anniversary of the Government under His Highness the Lord Protector,” and “A Poem upon the Death of His Late Highness the Lord Protector.” Though Marvell’s abrupt shift from apparent royalism in “Tom May’s Death” to apparent parliamentarianism in the Cromwell poems has invited critical debate, I argue that the main issue in all four of the poems is not factional loyalty but the challenge of narrating a world that seems to have abandoned historical norms. Marvell suggests that Cromwellian temporality belongs less to human history than it does to natural history and is therefore exempt from human moral judgments. In the third section of the chapter, I discuss the temporality of nature itself, as represented in the shorter lyric poems “The Garden” and “To His Coy Mistress.” The final section analyzes Marvell’s longest poem, “Upon Appleton House,” whose libertine narrator reduces historical and natural temporalities to the scope of individual human experience.

2. “Tom May’s Death”
In the climactic moment of “Tom May’s Death,” the shade of Ben Jonson delivers a stirring monologue on the power of poetry to articulate truths that transcend partisan politics and historical differences:

When the sword glitters o’er the judge’s head,
And fear has coward churchmen silencéd,
Then is the poet’s time, ’tis then he draws,
And single fights forsaken virtue’s cause.
He, when the wheel of empire whirleth back,
And though the world’s disjointed axle crack,
Sings still of ancient rights and better times,
Seeks wretched good, arraigns successful crimes. (63-70)

Yet this tirade sits uneasily within the poem: it reads as a set piece, not an organic outgrowth of what came before it. The incongruity of the speech is not least the result of who utters it. Jonson is a decidedly flawed mouthpiece for an argument against self-promotion and politicking, and Marvell makes this clear through Jonson’s behavior in the rest of the poem. Still less is Jonson, whom his contemporaries “generally acknowledged to be closest in spirit to the writers of antiquity,” qualified to attack May for drawing parallels between modern England and the classical past:

Polydore, Lucan, Alan, Vandal, Goth,
Malignant poet and historian both.
Go seek the novice statesmen, and obtrude
On them some Roman-cast similitude,
Tell them of liberty, the stories fine,
Until you all grow consuls in your wine;
Transferring old Rome hither in your talk . . .
Foul architect that hadst not eye to see
How ill the measures of these states agree;
And who by Rome’s example England lay,
Those but to Lucan do continue May. (41-54) 282

“Tom May’s Death” is a satire on Jonson as much as on May. As the poem progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that Marvell sees Jonson and May as two of the same: recusants and

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court hangers-on given to heavy drinking and reckless classicism. The poem, then, is less optimistic than critical opinion generally concludes. Marvell cautions contemporary poets against relying too heavily on historical precedent; yet by placing Jonson and his opinions outside human temporality, he suggests (as he will do later in “An Horatian Ode”) that breaking free from the past may be an impossible goal.

The unreliability of Jonson’s satiric voice in “Tom May’s Death” is characteristic of Menippean satire, a genre dedicated to cutting illustrious figures down to size. Characterized by grotesque descriptions, mock encomia “praising a dishonorable state or thing,” and a “rejection of aesthetic norms,” it emerged as the preeminent form of anti-intellectual and anti-humanist satire (and self-satire) in early modern Europe. Both classical and early modern Menippean satires often feature the rhetorical device of prosopopoeia, defined by Richard Bernard in 1609 as “the feigning of a person: when wee bring in dead men speaking, or our selues doe take their person vpon vs, or giue voice vnto senselesse things.” The ur-texts of early modern Menippean satire are Lucian’s satirical dialogues, most of them featuring the satirist Menippus of Gadara, whose works are now lost. Like Marvell, Lucian animates a dead poet in order to poke fun at religious beliefs and historical figures. In his satires, Menippus is a naïve (or, perhaps, faux-naïf) seeker of knowledge, who, having listened to a number of academic debates, “could not but believe men that spake so bigge words and wore so bigge beards, yet knew not to what

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283 See W. Scott Blanchard, Scholars’ Bedlam: Menippean Satire in the Renaissance (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1995) and Ingrid de Smet, Menippean Satire and the Republic of Letters 1581-1655 (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1996). Renaissance scholars were interested not only in writing satire but also in speculating about its nature and origins. These scholars included Petrus Nannius, Julius Caesar Scaliger, his son Joseph Scaliger, and Justus Lipsius, who published an imitation of Seneca the Younger’s Apocolocyntosis in 1581.

opinion to incline, where I might finde such certaintie as could not be confuted by others.”

Disillusioned with his fellow men, he seeks truth on Olympus, but the gods and heroes he encounters there prove more petty, cowardly, and irritable than myths and histories led him to believe. Charon and Hermes bicker over petty debts to each other, such as a few coins and a darning needle; Pluto reveals that Socrates put on a brave face for those who watched him commit suicide, but when it came time to cross the Styx, “he shrieked like an infant and cried for his children and went frantic.”

Early modern Menippean satires are given to puncturing intellectual pretensions in particular. W. Scott Blanchard characterizes Menippean satire as “a genre both for and about scholars; it is an immensely learned form that is at the same time paradoxically anti-intellectual. If its master of ceremonies is the humanist as wise fool, its audience is a learned community whose members need to be reminded, with Paul, of the depravity of their overreaching intellects, of the limits of human understanding.” One representative example of seventeenth-century Menippean satire is Donne’s *Ignatius his Conclave* (1611) which I discuss in my first chapter. The Jesuits’ journey to the moon recalls Lucian’s *Icaromenippus, or the Loftie Traveller*, in which Menippus claims to have made his own interstellar voyage. But the most Menippean characteristic of *Ignatius* is Donne’s skewering of scientific, religious, and social innovators, including Mohammed, Machiavelli, Paracelsus, and Pietro Aretino. There is no “straight man” in Donne’s hell, except perhaps Lucifer, who gives serious thought to each new supplicant:

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285 Lucian, “Icaromenippus, or the Loftie Traveller,” in *Certaine select dialogues of Lucian together with his true historie, translated from the Greeke into English by Mr Francis Hickes* (Oxford: William Turner, 1634), 14.
288 Allusions to Menippus and the moon are legion in seventeenth-century English literature. See, for instance, Richard Zouch, *The Sophister* (printed by J. O. for Humphrey Mosley, 1637): “I beleive you have beeene with Menippus, as farre as the Moone: your talke favours of Lunacy.”
“Lucifer stuck in a meditation. For what should he do? It seemed vniust to deny entry to him which had deserued so well, and dangerous to graunt it, to one of so great ambitions and undertakings.”

Menippean satire generally refuses to provide a standard of normalcy from which certain characters diverge; everyone is equally ridiculous. One of the purposes of the form is to eliminate earthly distinctions between men and emphasize, instead, their subservience to the passions they all hold in common: “It was no mean apprehension of Lucian, who sayes of Menippus, that in his travels through Hell, hee knew not the Kings of the Earth from other men, but only by their lowder cryings and tears[.]”

It would be a mistake, then, to read Marvell’s Jonson as an uncompromised conduit for moral and intellectual truth, especially as his attacks on May are “a travesty of May’s views, and of the way his poetry and his prose were engaged in public affairs.” May, a parliamentarian translator, poet, and historian best known for his translation of Lucan’s Pharsalia (and his subsequent original additions to it), died suddenly in November 1650. May seems to have come late to his parliamentary sympathies: though not a courtier, he was familiar enough to Charles I to have been considered for the position of poet laureate after Jonson’s death in 1637. Rumor had it that May abandoned the royalist cause after his coveted post went instead to Sir William Davenant. Though May wrote prolifically in favor of republican ideals after 1642, Jonson’s specific charge—that May drew direct and inappropriate parallels between republican Rome and

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290 Francis Bacon, *The remains of the Right Honorable Francis, Lord Verulam, Viscount of St. Albans, sometimes Lord Chancellour of England being essayes and severall letters to severall great personages, and other pieces of various and high concernment not heretofore published* (London: printed by B. Alsop for Lawrence Chapman, 1648), 8. This quotation comes from “An Essay on Death,” which is not to be confused with Bacon’s more famous “Of Death,” and which may not even be by Bacon.
seventeenth-century England—is incorrect.293 Indeed, May himself denies any implicit parallels in his dedication of the Pharsalia to William, Earl of Devonshire: “The History of it, is the greatest of Histories, the affairs of Rome, whose transcendent greatnes will admit no comparison with other States either before, or after it.”294 While this may be mere self-protecting prevarication, it certainly weakens Jonson’s argument.

Regardless of the content of May’s writings, the notoriously arrogant and self-promoting Ben Jonson is certainly a curious choice for a spokesperson for literary virtue. Just as the speaker of Donne’s Anniversaries cannot express his message to “forsake this rotten world” except through the worldly medium of satire, so Marvell’s injunction to poets issues from a decidedly flawed mouthpiece. Though William Drummond’s account of Jonson’s visit to him in the winter of 1618-19 did not appear in print until 1711, Jonson’s contemporaries would doubtless have recognized him in Drummond’s description:

He is a great lover and praiser of himself, a contemner and Scornor of others, given rather to losse a friend, than a Jest, jealous of every word and action of those about him (especially after drink, which is one of the Elements in which he liveth) a dissembler of ill parts which reign in him, a bragger of some good that he wanteth, thinketh nothing well bot what either he himself, or some of his friends and Countrymen hath said or done. He is passionately kynde and angry, carelesse either to gaine or keep, Vindicative, but if he be well answered, at himself.295

Jonson was also known for his relentless classicism, and though he may not have drawn explicit parallels between England and Rome, his historical writings were interpreted that way by his contemporaries. After the first performances of Sejanus in 1603 or 1604, the Catholic convert Jonson was questioned by the Privy Council on charges “both of popперie and treason” related to

293 See Smith, The Poems of Andrew Marvell, 117: “none of May’s published pamphlets contains the parallels between ancient republicans and modern Parliamentarians suggested in the poem.”
the play. The original performance text of *Sejanus* has been lost, but the much-revised 1605 quarto edition “excised offensive references . . . It is likely that some of the play's lines about the behaviour of princes and court favourites were more sharply pointed in the acting text.” 296 John Jowett observes that “Jonson’s representation of his own position as of denying the applicability of historical analogues is qualified, if not completely overturned, by a model of that selfsame position inscribed within [*Sejanus*]”: namely, the interrogation of the historian Cremutius Cordus by the Senate. 297 Jonson could not, it seems, resist the temptation to appropriate for himself “some Roman-cast similitude.”

Royalist rumor had it that May’s sudden death was the result of drink, and Marvell’s May arrives still inebriated in the underworld, searching the Stygian shore for his favorite pubs, “The Pope’s Head” and “The Mitre” (7). 298 This reference to May’s rumored Catholicism serves to link him with Jonson even before May mistakes the famously rotund and bibulous poet for his friend Henry Ayres, “a member of the Vintners’ Company in the 1640s.” 299 But, adds Marvell, “'twas a man of much another sort” (12):

'Twas Ben that in the dusky laurel shade  
Amongst the chorus of old poets laid,  
Sounding of ancient heroes, such as were  
The subject’s safety, and the rebel’s fear.  
And how a double-headed vulture eats  
Brutus and Cassius, the people’s cheats. (13-18)

The phrase “much another sort” is too little, too late: the Ayres comparison has already reminded us of Jonson’s appearance and drinking habits while he was alive, and it appears, remarkably,

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298 See Norbrook, “May, Thomas (b. in or after 1596, d. 1650).”
299 Smith, *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, 121, fn. 10.
that he has retained his “corpulence and port” (11) even after his soul has fled his body.  
In the mid-seventeenth century, the word “port” generally meant “bearing” or “comportment”; but it had also been used in its modern sense, i.e. “fortified wine,” since at least the 1620s. Marvell thus suggests that Jonson’s gait is that of one who has been drinking—hardly a heroic entry for a man who will later articulate such lofty ideals.

Jonson greets May with an erudite parody of the opening lines of the *Pharsalia*—“‘Cups more than civil of Emathian wine, / I sing’” (21-22)—but soon loses his composure. After May tries to ingratiating himself to Jonson “with foot as stumbling as his tongue” (27), Jonson tears “his own bays” (32) in fury and whips May “o’er the pate” with a “laurel wand . . . [a]t whose dread whisk Virgil himself does quake, / And Horace patiently its stroke does take” (33-37). The scene is utterly ridiculous: Marvell reduces Jonson to a blustering schoolteacher who uses his laurels to spank the greatest luminaries of Roman epic. These are not the actions of a poet devoted to upholding ancient heroic ideals, and they make the first lines of Jonson’s tirade against May ring hollow: “Far from these blessed shades tread back again / Most servile wit, and mercenary pen” (39-40). If Jonson regularly comes after Virgil and Horace with his laurel ferrule, he surely feels less reverence for their “blessed shades” than he expects May to feel. And if Jonson metes out the same punishment to two of the greatest poets of antiquity that he does to May, how seriously are we to take his criticism of May? Jonson’s opinions may have changed, but he retains the passions for which he was notorious in life.

The opening scene of the poem places Jonson “[a]mongst the chorus of old poets,” yet still manages to isolate him and emphasize his singularity. Famously gregarious in life, Jonson appears in “Tom May’s Death” as a solitary figure “who knew not neither foe nor friend, / Sworn

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300 Smith notes that “Jonson’s love of drink was also used in a Menippean satire designed to mock a wine patent, *The Copie of a Letter Sent from the Roaring Boyes* (1641[.])” *Ibid.*, 118.
301 *Oxford English Dictionary*, “port, n.4” and “port, n.7.”
enemy of all who did pretend” (29-30), a description that recalls Marvell’s characterization of Cromwell in “An Horatian Ode”: “For ’tis all one to courage high, / The emulous or enemy” (17-18). The “old poets” who surround Jonson make no further appearance in the poem, reacting neither to Jonson’s cautionary song of ancient rebels nor to his criticism of May. Jonson is the only character, May not excepted, whom the poem quotes directly. Marvell thus deprives May of a chance to speak for himself, but he also deprives Jonson of the approval of his peers. Jonson later tells May that the “dust” of “Spenser / And reverend Chaucer . . . does rise / Against thee, and expels thee from their side” (85-87), but it seems that he speaks figuratively, and that Spenser and Chaucer have no active role in the scene. Toward the end of his life, however, Jonson was known for his “Tribe of Ben,” a group of younger poets who haunted his company. In his satire “An Epistle, Answering to One that Asked to Be Sealed of the Tribe of Ben” (1623)—which, curiously, has been overlooked by critics as a source for “Tom May’s Death”—Jonson distinguishes his group of friends from the “Covey of Wits” (22) who trade “news they get” of military and political actions elsewhere in Europe. Jonson wrote this poem after he had been overlooked in favor of his rival Inigo Jones during the court’s preparations for the arrival of Prince Charles and his Spanish fiancée.302 The “Epistle” is a patently Jonsonian blend of pettiness and self-righteousness, an assertion that Jonson could not care less about “the Match from Spaine” (36) despite all evidence to the contrary. In “Tom May’s Death,” however, Jonson neither possesses nor desires followers.

The temporality in which he operates has also changed, lowering the stakes of his arguments. Like “Tom May’s Death,” “An Epistle” contains a vague but stirring articulation of a hypothetical “cause” independent of court politics:

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But if for honour we must draw the sword,
And force back that which will not be restor’d,
I have a body yet that spirit draws,
To live or fall a carcase in the cause. (39-42)

But there is a crucial difference between these lines and Jonson’s tirade in “Tom May’s Death.”
In Marvell’s poem, Jonson is already a “carcase” with nothing to lose by his opinions. This, too, belongs to the Menippean tradition. The source of much of Lucian’s humor comes from the fact that his underworld exists outside (or below) linear time and the dynamics of cause and effect, yet the shades continue to conduct themselves as if their actions might have consequences. Lucian is fond of making one dead person threaten to kill another or two skeletons bicker over which one is more attractive. “Then is the poet’s time, ’tis then he draws,” says Jonson; but what does “then” mean in the underworld? One seizes occasion by the forelock in life, not in death. And why should Jonson criticize May for “Roman-cast similitude[s]” in a world that allows him to associate personally, if not cordially, with Virgil and Horace? Just as he advocates virtues that he failed to practice in life, so he makes an argument about temporality from an atemporal position.

In a later Menippean satire, “The Loyal Scot” (1667-73), Marvell constructs a scene that evokes “Tom May’s Death” while reversing the circumstances.\textsuperscript{303} Now the newcomer to Elysium, a young Scottish captain killed in the Dutch attack on the Medway in 1667, requires not chastisement but praise. The shades of the poets (no Jonson in sight) choose the royalist satirist John Cleveland, who had died in 1658, to perform “a favourable penance” by addressing Archibald Douglas:

\begin{quote}
He understood, and willingly addressed
His ready Muse to court the warlike guest.
Much had he cured the tumour of his vein,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{303} The first part of “The Loyal Scot” is adapted from a slightly earlier satire, “The Last Instructions to a Painter” (1667).
He judged more clearly now, and saw more plain;
For those soft airs had tempered every thought,
And of wise Lethe he had took a draught. (7-12)

Repudiating the anti-Scottish satire that he wrote in life, Cleveland praises Douglas for his fearlessness in death: “Much him the glories of his ancient race / Inspire, nor could he his own deeds deface” (39-40). With the phrase “wise Lethe,” Marvell makes explicit what he had merely suggested in “Tom May’s Death”: that death allows poets to forget petty political and personal concerns. But if it is “wise Lethe” that cures a writer’s satiric vein, can he achieve nonpartisan integrity before death? For that matter, Lethe’s effects on Cleveland seem short-lived. After celebrating Douglas, he launches abruptly into an anti-episcopal tirade, arguing that “[t]is Holy Island parts us, not the Tweed” (94). His attack on the English bishops is more than twice as long as his eulogy for Douglas. By the end of the poem, Cleveland is as satirical as he ever was in life, albeit in the service of a slightly different cause. In both “Tom May’s Death” and “The Loyal Scot,” Marvell uses Menippean satire to make a decidedly Hobbesian suggestion: that disinterested virtue and a clean break with the past are unachievable for poets, or indeed anyone, in life. And why not, when our taste for satire and self-promotion lingers beyond the grave?

3. The Cromwell Poems

Marvell almost certainly composed his first poem in honor of Oliver Cromwell several months before “Tom May’s Death.” Though “An Horatian Ode” is far from an uncomplicated celebration of Cromwell, it lacks the obvious royalism of “Tom May’s Death,” which has led some critics to speculate that the satire is not Marvell’s work at all.304 This claim strikes me as incredible, given that both poems address exactly the same problem: the poet’s role in a society

304 See Smith, The Poems of Andrew Marvell, 116: “The absence of the poem from Bod. 1 has led some (in particular, [George de F.] Lord) to doubt M.’s authorship. It was also oddly placed in 1681 between ‘The Picture of Little T. C.’ and ‘The Match.’ ” I follow Smith in believing that “[i]nternal evidence confirms M.’s authorship.”
that no longer seems to correspond to political norms or historical precedents. The question of Marvell’s political allegiance in the 1640s and 1650s has received exhaustive scholarly attention in the last few decades, and I am not sure that answering it definitively would help us understand further than we already do what his poems have to say. We must simply accept that, in David Norbrook’s words, “his poems of this period simply do not show consistency: with great force, they make incompatible utterances.”

Like *Leviathan*, the group of Cromwell poems constitutes a meditation on power per se, not on the employment of that power in the service of specific people or ideologies. Two ideas in particular surface throughout all three poems: that political power can reshape time, and that the poet inhabits an eternal present that can undermine a general’s or sovereign’s claims on the past or the future. “Marvell’s public poems are occasional poems, responsible only to their occasions,” writes Blair Worden. This statement can be applied not only to the political convictions expressed in the poems but also to their view of poetic temporality, which for Marvell is based in sensory perception. For Ryan Netzley, “the lesson of Marvell’s Cromwell poems” is that “[o]ne cannot pledge allegiance to a person, a position, or even a nation. One can declare allegiance only to a force or movement. And it is lyric that allows one to locate and praise this present force, instead of reducing it to a wishful future or an inert past narrative.”

Though I would challenge Netzley’s first proposition—the “present force” of the Cromwell poems bears the name of Cromwell, and that singularity is precisely Marvell’s point—I agree that in these poems, the political present has much in common with the poetic present. All three of Marvell’s Cromwell poems articulate the idea that Cromwell can compress, expand,
or otherwise alter time, drawing both past and future into his magnetic present moment. In “An Horatian Ode,” Cromwell “ruin[s] the great work of time” (34); engineers “that memorable hour” of the regicide, “[w]hich first assured the forced pow’r” (65-66); and makes “the Irish . . . ashamed / To see themselves in one year tamed” (74-75). In “The First Anniversary,” ‘Cromwell alone . . . the force of scattered Time contracts / And in one year the work of ages acts” (11-14); Marvell even suggests that Cromwell’s power might “precipitate the latest day,” i.e. the millennium (140). “A Poem upon the Death of His Late Highness the Lord Protector” declares that “all the year was Cromwell’s day” (142) and celebrates the accession of his son Richard: “A Cromwell in an hour a prince will grow” (312). According to the definition I established earlier, Marvell’s Cromwell is a libertine figure, a creature of both singularity and materiality. Instead of taking lessons or inspiration from history (though his deeds do admit historical comparison), Cromwell does it violence, reducing the past to raw matter for his present.

Cromwell and his followers, and parliamentarians in general, often received the appellation of “libertine” from their detractors. The word could signal “nonconformist” (i.e. one who professed himself free from the Church of England), and royalist writers from the 1640s to the 1660s made the most of the word’s double meaning. Writing in 1645, Edward Sherburne characterizes a parliamentarian “agitator” as one who “pleads for a Toleration of all Religions, being himselfe of none, or any at his pleasure, a meere Lawlesse Libertine . . . who cares not what he speakes or acts, feares not whom he offends or slanders, is a common enemy to all, a true friend to none, a wandring Meteor . . . nursed up by Cromwell at first by the Army[.]”

Likewise, James Heath’s scurrilous Restoration biography of Cromwell claims that he studied briefly at Lincoln’s Inn, but that his tenure was short-lived “by reason Laws were the bar and

obstacle of his impetuous resolutions and the quite contrary to his loose and libertine spirit, that he had a kind of antipathy to his Company and Converse there.”

Instead of insisting that Cromwell is more virtuous or principled than his slanderers claim, Marvell appropriates the vocabulary of libertinism in order to praise him. In “An Horatian Ode,” Cromwell stands apart even from his own followers: “For ’tis all one to courage high, / The emulous or enemy” (17-18). Like a solitary meteor, he flies “burning through the air” (21). He is immune to the pleas of “Justice” for “the ancient rights”: “But those do hold or break, / As men are strong or weak” (37-40). In “The First Anniversary,” Marvell moderates the language of singularity slightly: “Abroad a king he seems, and something more, / At home a subject on the equal floor” (389-390). But in “The Death,” the images of cosmic domination return: Cromwell’s singularity has extended so far as to become universal.

Cromwell’s libertinism is most apparent when contrasted with the comportment of Charles I in “An Horatian Ode,” composed in the summer of 1650 as an ambivalent celebration of the New Model Army’s new commander-in-chief. Throughout the poem, Marvell sets up a tension between recorded history and the sweep of natural time, assigning the former to the late Charles I and the latter to Cromwell. Critics have noted that Marvell’s description of the 1649 regicide is decorous, almost hagiographic, and have even speculated that “An Horatian Ode” is covertly (or less-than-covertly) royalist. I propose, rather, that Charles and Cromwell operate

309 James Heath, Flagellum, or the Life and death, birth and burial of Oliver Cromweell faithfully described (London: printed for L. R., 1663), 10. The claim of his having attended Lincoln’s Inn after his year at Cambridge is probably false: “there is no trace of him in its records and no evidence of a common-law training in his later discourse.” See John Morrill, Cromwell, Oliver (1599-1658), Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.

310 At the beginning of the Irish expedition in May 1650, Sir Thomas Fairfax was commander-in-chief of the army, with Cromwell as his second-in-command. Cromwell replaced Fairfax as commander-in-chief on June 26. See Smith, The Poems of Andrew Marvell, 207.

311 The most influential such reading comes from Cleanth Brooks, “Criticism and Literary History: Marvell’s Horatian Ode,” Sewanee Review 55 (1947), 199-222. More recently, Blair Worden argues that “Marvell’s hatred of regicide remains unmistakable in both poems [“An Horatian Ode” and “Tom May’s Death”]. To call the early Marvell a royalist may be to simplify, but it is not an error” (“The Politics of Marvell’s Horatian Ode,” 526).
on different ontological planes within the poem. There is an air of fictionality, and thus
inevitability, about the narration of Charles’s death: Marvell designates him “the royal actor,”
doomed to “adorn” the “tragic scaffold” (53-54):

He nothing common did, or mean,
Upon that memorable scene;
But with his keener eye
The axe’s edge did try.

Nor called the Gods with vulgar spite
To vindicate his helpless right;
But bowed his comely head
Down, as upon a bed. (57-64)

The curious bloodlessness of Marvell’s narration (despite the actual presence of blood)
heightens the sense that we are witnessing a historical play:

This was that memorable hour,
Which first assured the forced pow’r.
So when they did design
The Capitol’s first line,

A bleeding head where they begun
Did fright the architects to run.
And yet in that the state
Foresaw its happy fate. (65-72)

Marvell’s treatment of Charles denies him the singularity that he ascribes to Cromwell. Tragedy,
after all, is a genre: it has a pattern and a set of conventions. Charles’s actions and
comportment escape into the abstraction of history, but his head becomes part of the material
with which Cromwell constructs a new state.

The ode begins by depicting a similar, though less successful, move from literary
abstraction into the realm of the material:

The forward youth that would appear
Must now forsake his Muses dear,
Nor in the shadows sing
His numbers languishing:
'Tis time to leave the books in dust,  
And oil th'unused armor's rust:  
Removing from the wall  
The corslet of the hall.

So restless Cromwell could not cease  
In the inglorious arts of peace,  
But through advent'rous war  
Urged his active star[.] (1-12)

The youth attempts to step into history, abandoning love lyrics for “unused armor” and “the corslet of the hall,” material representations of his family’s past that have hung for years on display. Like many of his contemporaries, Marvell was fond of Don Quixote, as his references to it throughout The Rehearsal Transpros’d (1672) make clear. The image of the rusted armor in “An Horatian Ode” recalls nothing so much as the self-dubbed knight’s preparations for his first quest: “And first of all he caused certaine olde rusty armes to be scoured, that belonged to his great Grand-father, and lay many ages neglected, and forgotten in a by-corner of his house; he trimmed them and dressed them the best he mought.” Finding that the suit of armor lacks a full helmet, Don Quixote spends a week constructing “a Beauer for his Morrion” with “certaine papers pasted together.” This patchwork helmet falls apart when he strikes it with a sword, so he reinforces it with iron bars and, “without making a second tryall, he deputed and held it in estimation of a most excellent Beauer.” The material remnants of the past cannot stand up to the experimental method.

Marvell’s version of this episode does not immediately register as satire in “An Horatian Ode,” but it is worth asking why he chooses to evoke Don Quixote, a character who drives

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314 Ibid.
himself mad by romanticizing the past. (The image of the rusted armor returns in a more overtly satirical form in The Rehearsal Transpros’d, in which “forgotten controversial divinity... is likened to ‘the rusty obsolete Armour of our Ancestors’, hung up ‘for derision rather than service.’”)315 Old armor may be a striking symbol of a national or familial past, but it is not necessarily battleworthy: the preposition in the phrase “corslet of the hall” implies that the armor belongs to the house, not to the world outside its walls. The forward youth’s backward preparations for war thus seem more romantic than serious. Armor that served in past wars may be inadequate to the present war; the solutions to England’s past problems may not be the solutions to its current ones. Indeed, the poem casts doubt on the young poet’s motives from the very first line: the phrase “forward youth who would appear” makes him seem decidedly self-promoting. Where, exactly, does he wish to appear? It hardly seems to matter, so long as he gains public recognition: his literary and military careers prove neatly interchangeable.

In an odd rhetorical maneuver, Marvell compares Cromwell to the poet (“So restless Cromwell”) instead of urging the poet to take Cromwell’s actions as a model.316 In other words, Cromwell forsakes “the inglorious arts of peace” in the same way that the youth forsakes his “numbers languishing,” and the poem has already led us to question the purity of the youth’s aims and the nature of his devotion to the past. The epithet “restless Cromwell,” like “forward youth,” is qualified praise at best.317 Yet, despite these aspersions, we must go through the youth to reach Cromwell. In other words, we access history through poetry even as the speaker tells us that the youth must forsake poetry for history. From its first lines, the ode casts Cromwell, whose

315 Smith, The Poems of Andrew Marvell, 273, fn. to lines 5-8.
316 Matthew Harkins proposes that through this comparison, “Marvell anticipates those who might have wished to criticize the general as dangerously forward; the analogy allows the poet to defuse such criticism and present Cromwell’s troubling behavior as a natural complement to the vigor and zeal of youth”—this despite Cromwell’s having turned 51 earlier in 1650. Matthew Harkins, “‘Forward Youth’ and Marvell’s ‘An Horatian Ode,’” Criticism 45:3 (Summer 2003), 344.
317 Many critics have noted the poem’s implied criticism of Cromwell. See Brooks, Carey, ed., 1969, 194.
name is legion across the British Isles, and the youth, who “would appear” but whose name never appears in the poem, as the obverse and reverse of a commemorative coin or medal. I use this comparison advisedly: as the youth attempts to turn old armor to a modern purpose, so Cromwell remolds history itself. But whereas the youth keeps the armor as it is, merely oiling off the rust, Cromwell reduces the past to so much molten metal:

Who, from his private gardens, where
He lived reserved and austere,
As if his highest plot
To plant the bergamot;

Could by industrious valour climb
To ruin the great works of time,
And cast the kingdoms old
Into another mould.

Though Justice against Fate complain,
And plead the ancient rights in vain,
But those do hold or break,
As men are strong or weak. (29-40)

These three stanzas create a distinctly baroque sense of temporal and spatial disproportion. We move breathlessly between the temporalities of vegetation, national history, and super-historical “ancient rights”; between the spatial planes of gardens, kingdoms, and embodied virtues. Once on the public stage, Cromwell returns to the past, just as the youth does, to gather raw materials for his designs; but he must first dissolve the “great works of time,” presumably institutions, into raw materials. The political present, it appears, cannot be created ex nihilo. But neither can the poetic present: this is, after all, a Horatian ode, and its classicism cannot be denied despite Marvell’s apparent wariness of the past. Gerard Reedy notes the ode’s resemblance to Horace’s “Nunc est bibendum,” which also expresses “divided

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Smith identifies “bergamot” as “the bergamot pear . . . considered to be the pear of kings” by such writers as Theophrastus (The Poems of Andrew Marvell, 274, fn. to l. 32). The modern usage, which refers to a small citrus fruit, did not become common until the eighteenth century; the OED’s first example is from 1696. “Ancient rights” signifies “the place of the monarch in an ancient constitution”: ibid., 275, fn. to l. 38.
sympathies” toward its subjects, Augustus and Cleopatra: “By means of classical precedent
[Marvell] assures himself that the sort of doubts which he and others have accompanied even the
poetic voices announcing the birth of the pax Augustana.”

The couplet “So much one man can
do, / That does both act and know” (75-76) invokes yet another classical author, this time a
historian: Sallust, who describes Julius Caesar similarly in The War with Catiline. Indeed,
Marvell compares Cromwell directly to Caesar later in the poem:

A Caesar ere long to Gaul,
To Italy a Hannibal,
And to all states not free
Shall climacteric be. (101-104)

Here Cromwell does not just control time: he is time, embodying a “climacteric,” a decisive
moment in a nation’s history. Yet it appears that a political poem, like a political structure,
cannot be created ex nihilo: Cromwell is not without historical precedent in Caesar and
Hannibal. As Cromwell forms the matter of the past into a coherent present, so Marvell remolds
the poetic matter of the past, and in doing so reveals the limitations of this process. The ode
promises liberty to “states not free” even as it struggles to break free from the patterns of
history.

In “The First Anniversary of the Government” and “A Poem upon the Death of His Late
Highness the Lord Protector,” Marvell evokes a poetic work to which he would return at greater
length in “Upon Appleton House”: Donne’s Anniversaries, the subject of my first chapter. To the
best of my knowledge, the connection between the Anniversaries and the two later Cromwell
poems has not been discussed previously, but it seems clear to me that Donne’s temporal

320 “Climacteric” could be either a noun or an adjective. OED uses Marvell’s phrase to illustrate the adjectival form of the word: “constituting or having the effect of a critical event or point in time; critical, decisive; epochal.” (OED, “climacteric, adj. and n.,” 1b.) I read the word as a noun, but the significance stands either way.
experiments in his three elegies for Elizabeth Drury influenced Marvell throughout his career. Of course, there is an obvious difference between the subjects of the poems: Elizabeth Drury is a private citizen to whom Donne attributes sovereignty, and Cromwell is a sovereign in fact. They are nonetheless both anti-historical figures, in part because of their apocalyptic force. Drury’s death renders irrelevant the measurement of time or the writing of history. Likewise, Marvell refers to Cromwell’s potential to “precipitate the latest day” (140) through his military exploits, and the end of history means the end of historians: there will be no one left to write the life of Cromwell. Yet Cromwell’s death in 1658 finally reduced him to the past tense. In “The Death,” Marvell attacks this problem with Donnean subtlety, rendering the world of Cromwell’s survivors vaguely post-apocalyptic: “Valour, Religion, Friendship, Prudence died / At once with him, and all that’s good beside” (227-228). The appearance of Cromwell’s son Richard at the end of the poem, however, implies that it was not Oliver Cromwell who was singular, but his entire bloodline: “A Cromwell in an hour a prince will grow” (312).

Written in December 1654 or January 1655, the “First Anniversary” marks the passage of a year even as it holds out the possibility of alternative, non-linear temporalities governed by a singular figure. Ordinary man, the poem begins, has no power over time: like “a sinking weight” in a river, he “disappears / In the weak circles of increasing years . . . While flowing Time above his head does close” (2-6). By contrast,

Cromwell alone with greater vigour runs,  
(Sun-like) the stages of succeeding suns:  
And still the day which he doth next restore,  
Is the just wonder of the day before.  
Cromwell alone doth with new lustre spring,  
And shines the jewel of the yearly ring.  
’Tis he the force of scattered Time contracts,  
And in one year the work of ages acts:

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While heavy monarchs make a wide return,  
Longer, and more malignant than Saturn:  
And though they all Platonic years should reign,  
In the same posture would be found again. (7-18)

Like Elizabeth Drury, Cromwell becomes not just the governor but the arbiter of time, not experiencing but “restor[ing]” successive days. The repeated “Cromwell alone” recalls Donne’s refrain of “She, she is dead”: the phrases stress the individuality of their subjects even as they attribute to them the power of establishing a universal temporality. The “heavy monarchs” who are not Cromwell lack his power over time: “Thus (image-like) an useless time they tell, / And with vain sceptre strike the hourly bell” (41-42). “Useless time,” a phrase that to the best of my knowledge is unique to this poem in the early modern period, does not mean “inaccurate time.” Smith interprets “image-like” to mean “[l]ike the lifeless, mechanical figures that strike the hour on clock-faces,” but Marvell does not give the sense that these figures are tolling “the hourly bell” out of time. Rather, their time is “useless” because it is nothing but measurement, recalling Donne’s “orderly vicissitude of years.” Cromwell’s temporality is useful because he compresses “the work of ages” within it; other monarchs “[no] more contribute to the state of things, / Than wooden heads unto the viol’s strings” (43-44). Marvell’s subsequent comparison of Cromwell with Amphion, who supposedly built the walls of Thebes with the music of his lyre, further conflates time with materiality:

No note [Amphion] struck, but a new story layed,  
And the great work ascended while he played.  
The list’ning structures he with wonder eyed,  
And still new stops to various time applied[.] (55-58)

322 Smith, The Poems of Andrew Marvell, 288, fn. to ll. 41-42.
In this image of construction, statecraft, architecture, music, and poetry (note the double meanings of “story” and “lay”) all become material, not intellectual, projects, governed by the “time” of the lyre: useful time indeed.

Many parliamentarians had opposed Cromwell’s assumption of sovereign power in December 1653, accusing him of monarchical ambitions. “The First Anniversary” mounts an odd two-pronged defense, suggesting simultaneously that Cromwell’s actions have (and need) no historical precedent and that he might as well come from a line of kings whose existence would justify his sovereignty. Cromwell-Amphion constructed his protectorate, writes Marvell, “[w]hile “tedious statesmen many years did hack, / Framing a liberty that still went back” (69-70). Unlike their enemy, an unapologetic force of novelty, these statesmen attempt to justify their opposition to Cromwell’s government with reference to a possibly fictional English past. Their insistence on historical precedent draws them into the same error that Hobbes criticizes in his conclusion to Leviathan. As we have seen, he argues that it is a mistake for “Conquerors [to] require not onely a Submission of mens actions to them for the future, but also an Approbation of all their actions past; when there is scarce a Common-wealth in the world, whose beginnings can in conscience be justified” (3:1135). For Marvell, it is irrelevant whether the historical record excuses or fails to excuse Cromwell’s assumption of singular power: “All other matter yields, and may be ruled” (77). Yet this would seem to contradict the poem’s later praise of Cromwell, which Marvell places in the mouth of a foreign potentate: “He seems a king by long succession born, / And yet the same to be a king does scorn” (387-388). To resolve this problem, Marvell must demonstrate that Cromwell’s power is essentially different from a king’s, though equally strong. It is derived from, or at least similar to, the power of nature. Cromwell is “Sun-like” (8)

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and “like a star” (101), “our star that gives light and heat” (343); he “outwings the wind” (126). When his carriage overturns in Hyde Park, “not a stupid tree, / Or rock so savage, but it mourned for thee” (201-202). Ultimately, Cromwell’s sovereignty is vindicated not by factual or counterfactual versions of the past, but by nature, which has no history.

Cromwell’s domination of nature recalls Elizabeth Drury’s power in the *Anniversaries*, as does Marvell’s claim that Cromwell constitutes the vital force of the nation: “his one soul / Moves the great bulk, and animates the whole” (379-380). But as in the *Anniversaries*, this raises the question of what animated the nation before Cromwell’s arrival on the scene, and what force will replace him when he dies. “O could I once him with our title see,” laments the foreign prince, “So should I hope he might yet die as we” (391-392). The prince’s hope was fulfilled not quite four years later: Cromwell died on September 3, 1658, and Marvell, as a Latin secretary to the government, walked in his funeral procession on November 23.324 “A Poem upon the Death of His Late Highness the Lord Protector,” printed in January 1659, alters the Donnean conceit slightly: unlike Elizabeth Drury, Cromwell had an heir who would succeed him as lord protector, yet Marvell had already celebrated Cromwell as the sole vital force of the nation. Marvell complains that Cromwell’s death has created a post-apocalyptic landscape in which “we Death’s refuse, Nature’s dregs, confined / To loathsome life, alas! are left behind” (229-230); but he must also celebrate Richard Cromwell as the new ruler of a country whose citizens “wander like ghosts around [Cromwell’s] loved tomb” (300).

Marvell’s solution to the succession problem is terse yet convoluted: “And Richard yet, where his great parent led, / Beats on the rugged track; he, virtue dead, / Revives” (305-307). The phrase “virtue dead,” which in Latin would be an ablative absolute, sits ambiguously

between subject and verb. The context indicates that the primary meaning of these lines is “Virtue being dead, Richard revives it.” Yet the pronoun “he” is placed closer to “his great parent” than to “Richard.” This admits the possibility of another meaning, in which “revives” is an intransitive verb and “he” refers to Oliver. “Virtue” could mean “life force” or “power” as well as “honorable conduct,” suggesting an almost metempsychotic relationship between Oliver and Richard: the dead father revives in the son. Marvell would use Donne’s “Metempsychosis” to satiric effect in the second part of The Rehearsal Transpro’d, speculating of “all those Books that have appeared in so many several shapes against me” that “‘tis but the same Ghost that hath haunted me in these differing Dresses and Vehicles.” Here, though, he turns the motif of reincarnation to an elegiac purpose. What is truly singular, it turns out, is not Oliver Cromwell but his surname: “A Cromwell in an hour a prince will grow” (312). Yet, as Ashley Marshall argues, the poem “repudiates the metaphysical body of kingship” that could be passed from a sovereign to his successor, focusing instead on “the actual, decaying corpse—the body natural.” Marvell denies Cromwell a metaphysical body politic, yet he depicts a seamless transfer of power from father to son by identifying that power with the self-renewal of nature.

In the last lines of the poem, Marvell must surmount another obstacle: Richard Cromwell’s lack of qualifications other than his surname. The elegy deals diplomatically with Richard’s scant public service up to 1658: “He, as his father, long was kept from sight / In private, to be viewed by better light” (309-310). (Peter Gaunt offers a more devastating assessment: “For all but a few months during a life of nearly eighty-six years Richard Cromwell

was a minor figure of little national importance.\(^\text{328}\) Marvell’s rhetorical move in these lines is decidedly baroque: he represents privacy as a condition for power, shadow as a condition for light, as if Oliver and Richard Cromwell inhabit one of the chiaroscuro scenes of Caravaggio or Georges de La Tour. To make a mark on history, Marvell suggests, an actor must live most of his life outside it. In the first lines of the poem, accordingly, he casts Oliver’s undramatic death as a virtue:

\begin{quote}
The people, which what most they fear esteem,  
Death when more horrid, they more noble deem;  
And blame the last act, like spectators vain,  
Unless the prince whom they applaud be slain. (7-10)
\end{quote}

We return to the ontological gap between Charles I and Cromwell: the masses deem the king’s death more honorable than the Lord Protector’s because its violence plays out before their eyes, but Marvell suggests that the regicide’s very publicness lends it an element of fictionality. Spectators can leave the theater after a tragedy; the English people cannot leave the world that Cromwell has vacated.

Cromwell was the most public of public figures in the 1650s, yet Marvell continually represents him as separate from political history. Marvell’s clearest literary influence in the second and third Cromwell poems is Donne’s *Anniversaries*, a set of poems that appropriate the language of Renaissance historiography to celebrate a person who, by virtue of her age, gender, and lack of memorable words and actions, would not otherwise be the subject of a historical work. Marvell does exactly the opposite: he sets out to prove that the man at the center of English political life in the 1640s and 1650s is more akin to Elizabeth Drury than Charles I. Marvell’s Cromwell is not a historical actor but a force of nature, not an inhabitant of linear time but a reshaper of it. Public speeches are staples in Renaissance histories and biographies, yet

Cromwell is remarkably silent throughout the poems, speaking only once, in “The Death,” and then only for two lines (183-184). In “The First Anniversary,” Marvell even claims that

Cromwell lost, not gained, power by assuming control of the protectorate:

For all delight of life thou then didst lose,  
When to command, thou didst thyself depose;  
Resigning up thy privacy so dear,  
To turn the headstrong people’s charioteer;  
For to be Cromwell was a greater thing,  
Than ought below, or yet above, a king:  
Therefore thou rather didst thyself depress,  
Yielding to rule, because it made thee less. (221-228)

Of course, Cromwell had been in the public eye for several years before he became lord protector, and it seems unlikely that any seventeenth-century reader of this poem would accept Marvell’s contention that Cromwell assumed sovereignty precisely because “it made [him] less” than he had been. But what we see in these lines is an attempt—a self-consciously flawed one, as I will argue—to establish Cromwell as the most private of public figures (note Marvell’s familiar “thou”), and the most singular, even libertine, of rulers. To do this, Marvell must play yet again with proportion, perception, and paradox, assuring us that Cromwell lowers himself by rising, grows passive through action, and is “greater” than anything more or less great than a king (though not himself more or less great than a king: he is a king in fact if not in name).

But even as Marvell celebrates Cromwell’s meteoric rise to power, he reveals the gaps in that power by equating political and poetic virtue (I use the word “virtue” in the early modern sense of “personal authority”). Cromwell is a paradoxical and compromised figure: a destroyer of history who nonetheless admits comparison to Caesar and Hannibal; a sun or star who reached that cosmic position through “industrious valour” (Horatian Ode, 33); a king yet not a king, with one, not two, bodies. To describe Cromwell, Marvell must deploy what Roland Barthes attributes
to the dandy: a “[l]avish use of paradox.”³²⁹ Marvell’s occasionally tortured rhetoric reveals that the poet must exercise his own “industrious valour” in rendering a sovereign palatable. Critics have complained, for instance, that Marvell’s laconic praise of Richard at the end of “The Death” feels abrupt and forced, “a valiant but unconvincing attempt to celebrate the second head of a new ruling family[.]”³³⁰ But what if the attempt is less than valiant? What if Marvell wants us to see the cracks in the vessel—the unremitting effort required of a poet in a society in which old political norms no longer apply, events fail to correspond to historical precedents, and the complaints of “Justice against Fate” are futile? In “The First Anniversary,” Marvell promises that “my muse shall hollow far behind / Angelic Cromwell who outwings the wind” (125-126). To praise him or to keep an eye on him? Why not both?

4. “The Garden” and “To His Coy Mistress”

For Marvell, Cromwellian temporality is “natural” insofar as Cromwell is a force of nature. But nature does not behave consistently in Marvell’s poems, and calculating “natural” time within them is more complicated than tracing the movements of the heavens. Marvell portrays nature as essentially unstable and unpredictable, not least because of the fallibility of the organs with which we perceive it. In this he follows Donne, who complains that “beauty’s best, proportion, is dead,” and that the soul is trapped within “lattices of eyes” and “labyrinths of ears.” But Marvell, unlike Donne, refuses to draw a moral lesson from the death of proportion in nature and natural time. In Marvell’s poems, proportion is no longer beauty’s best, and disproportion is no longer a tragedy. “Disproportion” may even be too weak a word, as it implies a baseline for comparison, a stable yardstick by which to measure aberrations and monstrosities.

³²⁹ Barthes, Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes, 106.
In the *Anniversaries*, that yardstick is, or was, Elizabeth Drury; in her absence, the only remedy is to “[l]ook upward; that’s toward her, whose happy state / We now lament not, but congratulate.” For Marvell, writing four decades later, no such remedy is needed: the death of old epistemologies is not necessarily a death worth mourning.

Though the Cromwell poems toy with temporal and spatial perspective in nature, Marvell’s most richly visual poetic experiments lie elsewhere, in what might be called his “garden poems,” among them “The Garden” and “Upon Appleton House.” (Though “To His Coy Mistress” is not set in a garden per se, it takes a similar disorienting approach to natural time: the reader and her mental landscapes continually shrink and grow.) The imagery and temporality of the garden poems draw much of their force from seventeenth-century natural philosophy. New technologies revealed unknown aspects of the physical world even as they brought home to their users the vulnerability of the senses. A great irony lay at the heart of early modern experimental science: the advent of telescopes and microscopes promised to give their users a clearer view of nature, but they also demonstrated just how easily vision could be altered. “The new instruments did not offer direct observation at all,” write Ofer Gal and Raz Chen-Morris; “rather than extending and improving the senses, they were aimed at replacing them altogether.”

331 The same principle applied to pocket watches, which were not reliable until the seventeenth century. They externalized the singularity of temporal perception: each watch owner possessed not the key to the correct time, but a material manifestation of his own time. To rely on the authority of his watch was to admit that his innate perception of time was inaccurate, like Thomas Ady’s “silly Labourer, that counting the day by a Pocket Watch, whose Wheels being out of Kilter went too fast, he had such a conceit of his Watch, that he affirmed, That the Sun in the skie went too slow,

for his Watch was known to be true.” Time belonged to nature, but nature did not always provide a trustworthy standard for measurement.

Marvell’s favorite poetic setting, the garden, is a physical representation of the ability of human perception to alter nature’s appearance. “’Tis all enforc’d, the fountain and the grot, / While the sweet fields do lie forgot,” complains the speaker of “The Mower against Gardens” (31-32). But while the rustic mower sees gardens as threats to natural order, the more worldly speaker of “The Garden” welcomes the new epistemological possibilities represented by garden landscapes. As we progress through the poem, conventional narrative priorities shift and invert before our eyes:

No white nor red was ever seen
So am’rous as this lovely green.
Fond lovers, cruel as their flame,
Cut in these trees their mistress’ name.
Little, alas, they know, or heed,
How far these beauties hers exceed!
Fair trees! Wheres’e’er your barks I wound,
No name shall but your own be found. (17-24)

Marvell begins with a pastoral cliché—a man carving a woman’s name into a tree—and, just as we settle into its familiarity, shifts our focus abruptly from the person being praised to the material on which the praise is carved. Then he distorts the image even further, making us imagine a tree’s name (and what would that be?) carved into the tree itself. The object of

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332 Thomas Ady, *A candle in the dark shewing the divine cause of the distractions of the whole nation of England and of the Christian world* (London: printed for Robert Ibbotson, 1655), 92. The principal argument of the book is that “wrongfull killing of the innocent under the name of Witches” is the “Grand Errour of these latter Ages” and one of the primary causes of the civil wars. Ady argues that the slaughter of witches is not mandated by Scripture, and that people who seek religious truths outside Scripture are as misled as the “silly Labourer” with his inaccurate timepiece.

333 Though “The Garden” is traditionally identified with Marvell’s time at Nun Appleton in 1650-52, Smith follows Allan Pritchard in giving its date of composition as 1668, “based on evidence of the influence of poetry by Katherine Philips . . . and Abraham Cowley[.]” (Smith, *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, 152; Allan Pritchard, “Marvell’s ‘The Garden’: A Restoration Poem?,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 23:3 (Summer 1983), 371-388.) However, I find this argument unconvincing: the content and style of “The Garden” are so similar to those of “Upon Appleton House” that I cannot believe Marvell wrote the shorter poem almost two decades later.
signification, the words that signify it, and the surface on which we read those words all collapse into one. The garden dissolves the distinctions between ideas, language, and materiality.

Marvell’s retelling of Ovid in “The Garden” similarly inverts a familiar narrative structure, but with the added dimension of time:

Apollo hunted Daphne so,
Only that she might laurel grow;
And Pan did after Syrinx speed,
Not as a nymph, but for a reed. (29-33)

Smith argues that of all Marvell’s classical influences, “he prized above all others Ovid and considered him in some sense a version of the great Roman poet.”

Ovid’s Metamorphoses unravel histories that lie coiled within mundane plants and animals: laurels, reeds, spiders. We move from the familiar, visible, and tangible to the uncanny, invisible, and abstract. Each everyday object or being houses a history of human, predominantly male and heterosexual, desire. Marvell reverses this process of thought, suggesting that the women’s transformations, far from thwarting the desires of their pursuers, actually realized Apollo’s and Pan’s hopes. Daphne and Syrinx are valuable to the gods insofar as they have the potential to become plants. It is as if there were no way to acquire a laurel branch but by threatening a woman with rape—with a sexual impulse that turns out to be a different kind of impulse. For Marvell, argues Stephen Guy-Bray, “to have sex like a god would mean to have sex with plants.”

But whether or not we read Apollo’s pursuit of the laurel tree as sexual, the poem’s rejection of heterosexuality—and, more broadly, of sexual desire between humans—is unquestionable.

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Marvell likewise queers the story of Adam and Eve, reflecting impiously that Adam was
not as happy in Eden as he could have been: “Two Paradises ’twere in one / To live in Paradise
alone” (63-64). Dominic Gavin argues that “[i]n ‘The Garden’, the wood of ‘Upon Appleton
House’, and the Mower poems, the speaker supposes himself to be in an ideal state of nature,
where the lost harmony of man and world still prevails.” But “that happy garden-state, / While
man there walked without a mate” (57-58) is hardly a faithful rendition of the Book of Genesis.
(Contrast Adam’s complaint in Book 8 of Paradise Lost: “Among unequals what society / Can
sort, what harmony or true delight?” [8:383-384].) The “happy garden-state” envisioned by the
speaker of “The Garden” has no scriptural analogue: it is both ahistorical and postlapsarian (the
speaker has achieved the solitude he praises; Adam did not).

Indeed, I would argue that the temporality of “The Garden” has less to do with the Old
Testament than with early modern materialism and libertinism. Smith rejects the idea that “The
Garden” betrays a libertine sensibility, “on account of the seriousness with which M[arvell]
treats ideas of the natural.” But libertinism is never entirely playful: indeed, its jocoseriousness
is precisely the source of its imaginative power. The libertinism of “The Garden” lies less in its
playfulness (though, like most of Marvell’s poems, it is indeed playful) than in its relentless
insistence on singularity and solitariness. Nature is not universal in this poem: natural time is the
time of these particular herbs and flowers as perceived and described by this particular speaker,
who contemns not only the awards bestowed in society but the “toils” (6) necessary to earn them:

Meanwhile the mind, from pleasures less,
Withdraws into its happiness:
The mind, that ocean where each kind
Does straight its own resemblance find:
Yet it creates, transcending these,

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337 Smith, The Poems of Andrew Marvell, 154.
Far other worlds, and other seas;  
Annihilating all that’s made  
To a green thought in a green shade. (41-48)

This famous stanza bears a startling resemblance to Hobbes’s apocalyptic thought experiment in *De Cive*: “If we conceive the world annihilated except one man to whom there would remain ideas or images of all the things he had seen…they would appear as if they were external and not depending upon the power or virtue of the mind” (xvi). As in *De Cive*, the “ideas and images” in the man’s mind depend on external sense impressions: “a green thought in a green shade” suggests that his thoughts are literally colored by his surroundings. Yet in Marvell’s version, the focus is on the annihilation itself, not on what occurs despite it. Instead of fumbling to mentally reconstruct a destroyed world, the man himself destroys, at least temporarily, the very world that furnishes him with sensory stimuli. His impressions subsume the objects that generate them. If we locate the first principles of knowledge in our sensory perceptions, our knowledge is our own for better and worse: for worse in natural philosophy, but perhaps for better in poetry.

This harmonious confusion between the mind and its impressions continues into the final stanza of the poem:

How well the skillful gard’ner drew  
Of flow’rs and herbs this dial new,  
Where from above the milder sun  
Does through a fragrant zodiac run;  
And as it works, th’industrious bee  
Computes its time as well as we.  
How could such sweet and wholesome hours  
Be reckoned but with herbs and flow’rs! (65-72)

At first glance, these lines seem to depict either two or three distinct methods of reckoning time. Takashi Yoshinaka argues that “the bee works of its own volition, computing a time that differs
both from that of people in the garden and from that of the sun.” But however many kinds of measurement Marvell presents, they collapse into one another in a kind of infinite regress. The “herbs and flow’rs” are not simply telling nature’s time; they are telling a time that has been manipulated by man. When the speaker looks at the garden he sees not unadulterated nature but a representation of a representation of human time: not a sundial but not quite other than a sundial. There is a confusion in these lines between the passage of time and the instrument used to reckon that passage. If the hours are “sweet and fragrant,” they are so because of the very “herbs and flow’rs” that the speaker proposes we use to tell the time that passes within the garden, which is itself a collection of those “herbs and flow’rs.” The “herbs and flow’rs,” in other words, are three entities in one: they constitute the site of a distinct kind of time, but also the time that passes on that site and the instrument used to calculate that time. And they are a fourth entity, too: they are themselves, and the bee “[c]omputes his time” by using them as themselves.

In my introduction, I discuss Aristotle’s failure to draw a convincing distinction between time itself and our methods of measuring it. In the *Physics*, time is simultaneously “some kind of number” and “that which is counted.” Far from resolving this confusion, Marvell gives it another dimension, conflating time not only with the numbers used to reckon it but also with the instruments that mark those numbers. In Marmion’s *The Antiquary*, as we have seen, Petrutio fills his empty time by measuring it with his pocket watch. In “The Garden,” there is not even a nominal distinction between chronos and chronometry. With no baseline for temporal measurement, there can be no causes and effects, no consequences, no history. Marvell’s inversions of biblical and mythological narratives also set effects adrift from causes and so

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338 Takashi Yoshinaka, *Marvell’s Ambivalence: Religion and the Politics of Imagination in Mid-Seventeenth-Century England* (Woodbridge, England: Boydell and Brewer, 2011), 185. In Yoshinaka’s reading, which strikes me as somewhat farfetched, the bee symbolizes Cromwell: “both Fairfax and Cromwell compute time, but the kinds of chronometry they employ seem to be different” (189).
undermine political historiography. “The Garden” begins with what sounds like conventional Renaissance praise of *otium* over *negotium*: “How vainly men themselves amaze / To win the palm, the oak, or bays” (1-2). What is odd about this couplet is that Marvell concentrates his scorn not on the human desire for awards but on the actions they take to win those awards: “military, civic, and political achievement,” i.e. the actions recorded by historians.\textsuperscript{339} History commemorates actions and their consequences; Marvell envisions a materially rooted, and almost materialist, temporality that dissolves that dynamic entirely.

In “To His Coy Mistress,” Marvell likewise deals with philosophical libertinism, baroque disproportion, and the possibilities and limitations of a temporality that is at once singular and rooted in nature and the material world. Though he places these themes in the service of what appears to be a love poem, his version of the *carpe diem* motif is as far from other writers’ iterations of it as his version of the *Metamorphoses* is from Ovid. With some understatement, Smith observes that “To His Coy Mistress” is “noticeably less interested in the heterosexual erotic than its sources in Donne and Herrick.”\textsuperscript{340} The speaker seems more concerned with setting the stage for the seduction than with seeing it through; his invitation to “sport us while we may” (37) comes as something of an afterthought. “To His Coy Mistress” devotes a mere four lines to describing the body of the otherwise invisible mistress; the material of the rest of the poem is not flesh but land and time.

Like Donne in the *Anniversaries*, Marvell presents a series of paradoxes that seem less resolvable the more closely they are examined. (L. E. Semler associates this poetic effect with Mannerism, in which “art becomes exquisitely self-reflexive, dauntingly well-bred and

\textsuperscript{339} Yoshinaka, *Marvell’s Ambivalence*, 176.
\textsuperscript{340} Smith, *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, 77.
exhaustively demanding on the spectator."") In the face of reality, the speaker proposes two hypothetical situations. The reality is that his mistress will eventually die and decompose (remarkably, the speaker does not assign the same fate to himself). The first, and far more detailed, hypothetical imagines the woman delaying her decision until the end of time, while she and the speaker wander the habitable globe. The first couplet of “To His Coy Mistress,” “Had we but world enough, and time, / This coyness lady were no crime,” makes sense temporally but not spatially. Living until the end of time would give the frustrated lover more years in which to court his mistress, but it is unclear how having “world enough” would help his case, or even what “world enough” might mean. The “world enough” that the speaker envisions is no more than the known world: “the Indian Ganges’ side” (5) and “the tide / Of Humber” (6-7), the river that drowned Marvell’s father in 1641. If “world enough” means not “more world” but “the ability to traverse the world,” that too seems unlikely to make a difference in the woman’s disposition. Indeed, the scenario that the speaker envisions with the hypothetical backdrop of “world enough, and time” is the same scenario in which he currently finds himself: “And you should, if you please, refuse / Till the conversion of the Jews” (9-10). The conversion of the Jews marks the beginning of the end of the world, which gives the two protagonists precious little time in which to enjoy themselves—which is the very problem that first prompted the speaker to construct his imaginary timescape. He grants himself and his mistress all the time left to humanity, yet cannot picture any happier situation than his present one. This is a melancholy kind of libertinism, but one could argue that libertinism is inherently melancholy, conscious as it is of being bound by the senses.

342 “[T]he conversion of the Jews to Christianity was one of the events supposed to precede the Second Coming of Christ.” Smith, The Poems of Andrew Marvell, 81, fn. to l. 10.
The second hypothetical seems to picture the consummation of the affair, but a closer look reveals something quite different:

Now, therefore, while the youthful glew [glow]
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
And while thy willing soul transpires
At every pore with instant fires,
Now let us sport us while we may;
And now, like am’rous birds of prey,
Rather at once our Time devour,
Than languish in his slow-chapped power.
Let us roll all our strength, and all
Our sweetness, up into one ball:
And tear our pleasures with rough strife,
Through the iron gates of life.
Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run. (33-46)

What, exactly, is the speaker envisioning here? Every time the language approaches a description of human sexuality, it steps back abruptly and takes a more abstract turn. The phrase “am’rous birds of prey” sets up an expectation that is immediately thwarted by the next two lines. We end that portion of the passage two steps removed from a sexual encounter between the speaker and his mistress: they are no longer humans but birds; those birds are enacting their ferocity not on each other but on time. The next images have similar effects: there is nothing inherently erotic about altering the velocity of the heavens, let alone the shapes of such abstract concepts as “strength” and “sweetness.” For Jules Brody, the poem produces “a rather gross and obvious intertextual hodgepodge” of erotic conventions resolving in “a parody or a refusal of the carpe diem theme.”

If not love, what is “To His Coy Mistress” about? Yoshinaka reads the poem as a critique of “a mode of radical religio-political activism that lends itself to a rigid dogmatism,” narrated by

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a speaker who is “either a Royalist or a Puritan.” In my view, though the poem belongs to the same imaginative universe and set of philosophical concerns as the Cromwell poems do, it does not therefore constitute a political allegory. Rather, I read it a commentary on a world of new epistemological possibilities: a world in which time, proportion, and the order of nature—including sexuality—seem increasingly plastic and susceptible to the vagaries of individual perception. Marvell uses love to illustrate time, not vice versa. The temporality of the poem shifts continually, from chronological (the timeline of the history of the world) to a conventional image of tempus edax rerum ("Time’s winged chariot hurrying near") to material (time as a substance itself capable of being devoured). Above all else, the temporality of “To His Coy Mistress” is anti-historical. This is a poem with no past tense, narrated first in the imperfect subjunctive (“Had we but world enough and time”), then the present tense (“But at my back I always hear”), then the hortatory subjunctive (“Now let us sport us while we may”), and finally the future tense (“yet we will make him run”). Whatever disappointments the speaker has faced before the present moment of the poem, they never become explicit within it.

5. “Upon Appleton House”

At first glance, “Upon Appleton House,” written several years later, would seem to present a directly opposing view of time: one grounded in national and familial history. Yet several factors complicate this interpretation. The poem begins with an assertion that “all things are composed here / Like Nature, orderly and near,” before plunging us into a very different version of nature: the nature of the new science, full of reversals and surprises. “Upon Appleton House” revels in visual and temporal disproportion, in architectural and narrative singularity. It

344 Yoshinaka, Marvell’s Ambivalence, 194.
is also a private anti-history along the lines of the *Anniversaries*, albeit for a very public figure: Thomas, third Baron Fairfax, commander-in-chief of the New Model Army from 1645 to 1650, who had recently ceded his position to Cromwell and retired to his country seat of Nun Appleton in Yorkshire. But “Upon Appleton House” is not a conventional celebration of rural *otium*: in Rosalie Colie’s words, “although this poem certainly praises the perfect microcosmic order of an ideal moral ecology, it also presents the elements of that ideal ecology in so disorderly a fashion as to force attention to the problems involved in consciously living *any* life, even one of happy retirement.” Clinton Allen Brand argues that “Upon Appleton House” is “a poem about history and historiography,” yet “Marvell also fitfully questions his own historiography as he assays the possibilities for redeeming historical meaning among the contingency of events.” The house possesses the same attributes displayed by Cromwell in Marvell’s epideictic poems. It belongs to the order—or disorder—of nature, making it singular among human structures as Cromwell is singular among human beings. Others “think by breadth the world t’unite / Though the first builders failed in height” (23-24); the medieval architect of Nun Appleton had no such unificatory ambitions.

In the opening stanzas of “Upon Appleton House,” the speaker praises the building’s modest proportions. Unlike the “foreign architect . . . [w]hose columns should so high be raised / To arch the brows that on them gaze” (2-8), the designer of Nun Appleton took nature as his model:

Why should of all things man unruly
   Such unproportioned dwellings build?
The beasts are by their dens expressed:
   And birds contrive an equal nest;

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The low-roofed tortoises do dwell
In cases fit of tortoise-shell:
No creature loves an empty space;
Their bodies measure out their place.

The word “unruled” contains a neat irony: the architect strays outside the “rules” of nature despite, or perhaps because of, his reliance on his own “rule” or ruler. Technology aids man not in conforming to natural proportion but in escaping it. By way of contrast, Marvell presents a sort of Adamic language of architecture (note the word “expressed”): animal and dwelling correspond as precisely as signifier and signified did in Eden. But there is something strange about the speaker’s celebration of Nun Appleton’s “dwarfish confines” (38): it extends over nine stanzas. He begins with a negative description of the house as other than a foreigner’s “great design”; praises beasts and birds for their architectural restraint; returns to the negative description of “all this marble crust / T’impark the wanton mote of dust” (21-22); glances backward to “that more sober age and mind” (28) that produced Nun Appleton; glances forward to the people of “the after age” who will “hither come in pilgrimage” (33-34); describes the “holy mathematics” (47) that produce the “short but admirable lines” (42) of the house; paints a bizarrely pornographic picture of the building expanding to accommodate Lord Fairfax; and, in the eighth and ninth stanzas, notes the absence of superfluous adornments and furniture in the house. He has taken 72 lines, laden with metaphor and conceit, to communicate that the house is small and plain. Nun Appleton may conform to nature, but the speaker’s language fails to conform to Nun Appleton.

Colie notes the peculiar self-awareness of “Upon Appleton House,” a poem that “flaunts its own seams, points to its own joinery, publicizes its own gaps.” I would take Colie’s

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reading even further: in “Upon Appleton House,” language is unreliable because the concepts it
describes are unreliable. As in “The Garden,” it becomes increasingly impossible to distinguish
individual perception from the objects perceived. The governing myth of “Upon Appleton
House” is not Amphion but Narcissus. The speaker praises the house for being as “orderly” as
nature, yet Marvell’s version of nature—or of our perception of it, which comes to the same
thing—is anything but orderly:

’Tis not, what once it was, the world;
But a rude heap together hurled;
All negligently overthrown,
Gulfs, deserts, precipices, stone. (761-764)

The microcosmic grounds of Nun Appleton are more picturesque than “the world” at large, but
no less subject to the forces of chaos:

But Nature here hath been so free
As if she said, ‘Leave this to me’.
Art would more neatly have defaced
What she had laid so sweetly waste.
In fragrant gardens, shady woods,
Deep meadows, and transparent floods. (75-80)

This disorderliness, this elimination of the borders between objects and impressions, extends to
history and time. “Upon Appleton House” can be divided into roughly four sections: the
aforementioned description of the house (1-80); a brief and salacious history of Nun Appleton’s
transformation from a nunnery to the seat of the Fairfax family (81-368); a tour of the grounds
outside the house (369-648); and finally, in a clear homage to the Anniversaries, a description of
Fairfax’s young daughter Maria (649-776). Each section evokes, if it does not entirely inhabit,
a different genre: the country-house poem, the Procopian “secret history,” the pastoral, and the

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For a full discussion of Marvell’s debt to the Anniversaries, see Lewalski, Donne’s Anniversaries and the Poetry
of Praise, 355-370. Lewalski argues that “Maria is the true descendant of Elizabeth Drury. She is not Athena,
Heavenly Wisdom, or Sophia, but the twelve-year-old daughter of the Fairfaxes, who had a gift for languages and
excellent matrimonial prospects” (367).
epideictic. The transitions between these sections are marked by phrases that convey ongoing temporal experience: “While with slow eyes we these survey” (81); “And now to the abyss I pass” (370); “But now away my hooks, my quills” (649). These phrases give a sense of logical and linear progression, but the content of each section belies that sense. The four genres continually seep into one another. Generic and even ontological distinctions carry little force in a poetic world that relies on resemblances: recall Genette’s argument that the baroque aesthetic is characterized by a continual “deformation of the ‘same.’”

The epistemological heart of “Upon Appleton House” lies in a stanza describing the river that bisects the estate:

See in what wanton harmless folds
It ev’rywhere the meadow holds;
And its yet muddy back doth lick,
Till as a crystal mirror slick;
Where all things gaze themselves, and doubt
If they be in it or without.
And for his shade, which therein shines,
Narcissus-like, the sun too pines. (633-640)

Despite the speaker’s reference to “orderly” nature at the beginning of the poem, this stanza presents a nature that diverges from its accustomed order. The sun, source of earthly life and earthly time, contracts its scope to one tiny corner of Yorkshire. Instead of directing its focus outward, it falls in love with its own reflection. What kind of temporality issues from a sun that shines only for itself? The doubling effect extends throughout the rest of the poem: Fairfax’s house corresponds to his own size (49-56); his garden, “in the just figure of a fort,” mirrors his surroundings in his military life (281-288); the tall grass confuses the difference between men and grasshoppers (369-376); the wild pigeons in the forest sing in pairs (521-528); a kingfisher flies “betwixt the day and night” (670). And, as Smith observes, the figure of the poet functions as a double for Fairfax: “In his praise of Cromwell Marvell would later claim that he could only
'echo far behind’ the Lord Protector, but with Fairfax in retirement, he ‘echoes’ in the sense of appearing as a retainer who understands how best to present his master to the world.” But as the poem progresses, the distinctions between reality and metaphor, object and reflection, likewise grow indistinct. “Upon Appleton House” ends with an almost self-parodic jumble of similes:

But now the salmon-fishers moist
Their leathern boats begin to hoist;
And, like Antipodes in shoes,
Have shod their heads in their canoes.
How tortoise-like, but not so slow,
These rational amphibii go!
Let’s in: for the dark hemisphere
Does now like one of them appear. (769-776)

This stanza shuttles swiftly between species, eras, and ontological planes: the fishers resemble Roman soldiers whose formations themselves resemble tortoises. In the last couplet the image flips, like one of the mythical Antipodes, and the heavens resemble the men who were until now the things resembled: the tenor has become the vehicle.

The world of “Upon Appleton House” lacks a stable linguistic or temporal plane of reference because, like the Anniversaries, it is governed completely and overtly by the speaker’s sensory perceptions. Marvell’s narrator may be more pleasant than Donne’s, but he is no less of a personal presence, even in the less immersive first half of the poem. Though Marvell refrains from employing the first-person singular throughout his description of the house and its history, his occasional use of the first-person plural evokes the feeling of a walking tour with the speaker as our guide: “While with slow eyes we these survey . . . We opportunely may relate / That progress of this house’s fate” (81-84). This portion of the poem advances a relatively orthodox

350 Smith, The Chameleon, 98.
idea of history, one that privileges the public actions of prominent men like Fairfax and draws parallels between classical and contemporary figures:

And surely when the after age  
Shall hither come in pilgrimage,  
These sacred places to adore,  
By Vere and Fairfax trod before,  
Men will dispute how their extent  
Within such dwarfish confines went;  
And some will smile at this, as well  
As Romulus his bee-like cell. (33-40)

But this vision of history gradually gives way to others. Brand proposes that the poem “presents a kind of heuristic canvassing of different but interrelated ways of reading history . . . Marvell’s dazzling play of wit and his multiple and metamorphic perspectives thwart efforts to fix the poem’s historical argument in any particular religious or metaphysical frame of reference.”

While I would argue that “Upon Appleton House” offers not “multiple . . . perspectives” but one person’s constantly shifting perspective, it is true that Marvell refuses to privilege one kind of historical understanding over another.

This can be seen most clearly in Marvell’s identification of mainstream history with heterosexuality and procreation—and his identification of alternative historiographies with alternative sexualities. Marvell imagines the nuns who once reside in Nun Appleton as would-be seducers of Fairfax’s ancestor Isabel Thwaites: “Each night at midnight to your side / Appoint a fresh and virgin bride” (185-186). The lesbian nuns dwell in a “holy leisure” (97) outside history, and though Isabel almost commits to taking vows—“The nun’s smooth tongue has sucked her in” (200)—Sir William Fairfax abducts her from the place that had stood in the way of historical progress: “Yet, against fate, his spouse they kept; / And the great race would intercept” (247-248). But this should not be read as the unambiguous triumph of heterosexuality, or even of

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351 Brand, “‘Upon Appleton House’ and the Decomposition of Protestant Historiography,” 479.
human sexuality. “In many of Marvell’s poems,” writes Guy-Bray, “. . . it is the creation of the human race that is the problem, and human sexuality can never be the solution.”

Accordingly, when sexuality makes itself known elsewhere in “Upon Appleton House,” it is decidedly less orthodox. This pattern begins in stanza VII:

Yet thus the laden house does sweat,  
And scarce endures the Master great;  
But where he comes the swelling hall  
Stirs, and the square grow spherical;  
More by his magnitude distressed,  
Than he is by its straitness pressed:  
And too officiously it slights  
That in itself which him delights. (49-56)

Smith notes the mathematical imagery of this stanza, but the lines also conjure the extraordinary image of Fairfax having sexual intercourse with his house. In one sense, this reinforces the hetero-historical narrative, as the house has been gendered female by its proximity to the ruins of a nunnery. But the image is too bizarre to fit neatly into that narrative, especially as Marvell further blurs the line between humanity and architecture in stanza IX: the house possesses a “[a] stately frontispiece of poor” (65) and “[d]aily new furniture of friends” (68). If there is no real difference between people and objects, a man might well have sex with his house. Later in the poem, Marvell desexualizes the story of Noah’s Ark, characterizing the forest as “this yet green, yet growing ark . . . where all creatures might have shares, / Although in armies, not in pairs” (484-488). The gradual emergence of the speaker’s own sexuality complicates matters further. He celebrates his ensconcement within the forest as a retreat from human sexual entanglements: “Where Beauty, aiming at the heart, / Bends in some trees its useless dart” (603-604). What sexual impulses he does express are botanically oriented: “And ivy, with familiar trails, / Me
licks, and clasps, and curls, and hales” (589-590). Not coincidentally, the speaker’s “languishing with ease” (593) recalls the nuns’ “holy leisure”: whose side, really, is he on?

From this confusion of humans, plants, and objects emerges a distinctly libertine temporality, one based in an individual sensorium. Pertile argues that “Upon Appleton House” displays the influence of “the libertins, with their proto-scientific naturalism and their strong sense of the value of subjective experience.”

In “Upon Appleton House” as in the poetry of Théophile de Viau, “‘philosophy’ is understood not as a set of abstract ideas, nor even as a mystical, neo-Platonic trance, but as a first-person immersion in nature.” But though the speaker calls himself an “easy philosopher” (561), libertinism, like any philosophy, takes effort. Paradoxically, the libertine must labor to achieve a state of ease, and he must rely on other beings to achieve singularity:

Bind me ye woodbines in your twines,
Curl me about ye gadding vines,
And oh so close your circles lace,
That I may never leave this place:
But, lest your fetters prove too weak,
Ere I your silken bondage break,
Do you, O brambles, chain me too,
And courteous briars nail me through. (609-616)

We have strayed far from the genteel country-house poem and family history that “Upon Appleton House” seemed initially to be. For the speaker, dissolving into nature is desirable but not necessarily pleasurable (though we cannot, of course, overlook the sadomasochistic overtones of this stanza). The Christological implications of his imagery indicate that he sees both a sacrifice and a moral good in his retreat from the world.

The speaker’s mental struggle is understandable in a patronage context: his retreat into

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355 Ibid., 409.
otium mirrors that of Fairfax, and his difficulty in remaining there suggests a similar conflict in Fairfax’s mind. But identifying the speaker more than tangentially with Fairfax brings a host of complications, not least of which is the tension between the temporality Fairfax represents (linear, public, conventionally historical) and the singular and materialist temporality with which the speaker identifies himself. As he led us through the house, so he leads us through multiple versions of temporality, ending with a vision of human history that is rooted, literally, in natural history. First we view the “progress of the house’s fate” (84) from lubricious nunnery to seat of the Fairfaxes. Next we encounter a vision of a lost English Golden Age:

Oh thou, that dear and happy isle
The garden of the world ere while,
Thou Paradise of four seas,
Which Heaven planted us to please,
But, to exclude the world, did guard
With wat’ry if not flaming sword;
What luckless apple did we taste,
To make thee mortal, and thee waste? (321-328)

But with the speaker’s subsequent references to Fairfax and the Civil War, we realize that this Golden Age belonged to the recent, not mythic, past. Before the war, “[t]he nursery of all things green / Was . . . the only magazine” (340); now “[w]e ordnance plant and powder sow” (344). A few lines suffice to reverse the tenor and vehicle of the garden/war metaphor and gesture to a fundamental wrongness within this historical moment. In the ensuing stanzas, garden and war enact their own battle, each striving to become reality and push the other into the realm of metaphor:

The mower now commands the field:
In whose new traverse seemeth wrought
A camp of battle newly fought:
Where, as the meads with hay, the plain
Lies quilted o’er with bodies slain:
The women that with forks it fling,
Do represent the pillaging. (418-424)
Marvell presents us with a Klein bottle of similes: the mower is like a general who commands a new-mown field that is like a battlefield that itself is like a new-mown field. And, as if taunting us for trying to separate poetic device from reality, Marvell ends the stanza with the too-literal assurance that the women “represent” the pillaging. How silly of you, the speaker seems to say, to assume that any of this was more than a representation. For the moment, the garden has triumphed, and the moment is the temporality to which the libertine poet belongs.

As we progress through the landscape of the estate, historical figures, actions, and monuments, both factual and mythic, continue to retreat into the metaphorical plane. Instead of being themselves described by metaphors and similes, they become the images with which Marvell adorns a scene of rural labor. Anonymous mowers take on biblical or monarchical attributes: they “seem like Israelites to be, / Walking on foot through a green sea” (389-390), and their “wholesome heat / Smells like an Alexander’s sweat” (427-428). A woman who snaps up a bird killed by a scythe evokes “bloody Thestylis” (401) of the Aeneid. The mowers’ “[p]yramids of hay” resembles “the desert Memphis” (437-438) or the “Roman camps” that “rise / In hills for soldiers’ obsequies” (439-440). The mowing complete, Marvell draws his metaphor from the recent, not classical, past: now the field is “[a] levelled space, as smooth and plain / As cloths for Lely stretched to stain” (433-434) or a “naked equal flat, / Which Levellers take pattern at” 449-450). This section of “Upon Appleton House” recalls Digby’s criticism of Religio Medici: that Browne places himself, obscure and unremarkable, in the foreground of the “Popes, Emperours, Kings, Grand-Seigniors, he hath been contemporary unto[.]”\( ^{356} \) Not content to present a conventional scene of rural retreat from history, Marvell reduces civil history to linguistic adornment. But this device serves a dual purpose: even as it diminishes the grandeur of public

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\(^{356}\) Digby, Observations upon Religio Medici, 53.
figures and actions, it also binds Nun Appleton inextricably to the world outside it. After all, the speaker reminds us ominously, “lowness is unsafe as height” (411).

The scene of the mowers provides a transition between the public world of the house and the intensely private world of the forest, where we descend into the “abyss” not only of “that unfathomable grass” (369-370) but also of the speaker’s sensory universe. This section reveals the tension, which I noted earlier, between the speaker’s evident pleasure in the “loose . . . order” (507) of nature and his bizarre pleas to the vegetation to “chain” him within it. Why should a man who revels in the forest’s shifting perspectives and proportions need to be prevented forcibly from leaving it? This tension is related to the speaker’s desperate and ultimately futile attempt to rid himself of his own humanity, his human desire to make sense of his surroundings:

Thanks for my rest ye mossy banks,  
And unto you cool zephyrs thanks,  
Who, as my hair, my thoughts too shed,  
And winnow from the chaff my head. (597-600)

But his thoughts do not stray far. Despite his efforts, he cannot see natural objects for what they are, cannot exchange his temporality for theirs. He claims to have merged with the birds and trees: “And little now to make me, wants / Or of the fowls, or of the plants” (563-564). He boasts that he has exchanged human for avian language: “Already I begin to call / In their most learned original” (569-570). Yet his supposed dissolution into nature produces yet another vision of human history:

Out of this scattered sibyl’s leaves  
Strange prophecies my fancy weaves:  
And in one history consumes,  
Like Mexique paintings, all the plumes.  
What Rome, Greece, Palestine ere said  
I in this light mosaic read.  
Thrice happy he who, not mistook,  
Hath read in Nature’s mystic book. (577-584)
Human language, as Hobbes explains in Book 1 of *Leviathan*, is impossible without a sense of cause and effect: that is, a sense of temporal linearity. And it is this sense of linearity that the speaker sacrifices in order to apprehend the sweep of history in a single glance. In the “First Anniversary,” written about five years later, Cromwell “the force of scattered Time contracts / And in one year the work of ages acts”; the speaker of “Upon Appleton House” performs a similar contraction, reducing “the work of ages” to a scattering of leaves. But why should his supposed abandonment of human temporality produce a historical vision at all? In “Upon Appleton House,” libertinism and libertine temporality are defined by materialism and singularity, but also by failure.

Unlike Cromwell, the poet cannot inflict his singular sense of time on an entire nation. In fact, he cannot really inflict it on himself: hence his imploring the landscape to “nail me through” and “stake me down.” The speaker conceptualizes, but never fully inhabits, an early version of John Keats’s “negative capability”: the state of “being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.” To make sense of the world is to do it a kind of violence. The speaker attempts to turn that violence on himself, but the trees and vines refuse to oblige him. In the final section of the poem, however, Marvell presents us a compromise between public and private temporality: the figure of Fairfax’s twelve-year-old daughter Maria, whom Marvell tutored while living at Nun Appleton. Her presence, like Elizabeth Drury’s, bestows order on “loose Nature” (657), delivering the final blow to the speaker’s libertine temporality. If nature is no longer loose, no longer disproportionate and unpredictable, it is no longer a fit habitat for the libertine: “She straightness on the woods bestows” (691). But, also like Drury, she defies the sweep of civil history. Her virtue lies in her

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obscurity, and even her Narcissus-like glance in the water constitutes a resistance to worldly things:

And for a glass the limpid brook,
Where she may all her beauties look;
But, since she would not have them seen,
The wood about her draws a screen. (701-704)

Unlike Drury, however, Maria has the ability to live out her potential and step into her family’s history: “Till Fate her worthily translates, / And finds a Fairfax for our Thwaites” (747-748). She thus embodies the possibility of a temporality that is both natural and historical. This temporality may be as singular as the libertine’s, as incapable of being transferred to the wider world; but it is the speaker’s, and perhaps the nation’s, only hope.
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